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The Queen's Musketeer; OR, Thisbe, the Princess Palmist.

BY GEORGE ALBANY.

CHAPTER I.

On a very pleasant morning in June, in the year 1520, a young man in a rusty suit of brown entered the city of Paris on foot, in the hope of fortune.

He had, only a few minutes before, disposed of his horse to a butcher in the suburbs, from whom, before taking the seventeen crowns received for the animal, he had exacted a promise that he would treat it kindly always, and to a peck of oats immediately; "for," said he, "the poor beast, which has been in my family for seventeen years, has brought me a long way, and has besides had nothing to eat since daybreak, and then only traveler's fare."

In physical appearance, the young man was prepossessing. He was slightly above the medium height, of a slender but firm and symmetrical build, with fine Grecian features, large, clear, dark-brown eyes, a superb throat and neck, and a sumptuous proportion of dark-brown hair, which, in accordance with the custom of the day, hung in wavy luxuriance about his neck and shoulders.

He wore a slouched hat, with, for its only ornament, a heron's feather, fastened with a loop of tassel-cord; a close-fitting jerkin, reaching to his hips, and showing to the full the graceful proportions of his figure; a broad belt, with deep tabs; trunked pantaloons; russet shoes, with brown rosettes and high heels; and over his left shoulder a graceful short cloak, with a deep square collar.

At his side hung a long cross-handled sword, in a brass sheath, which had evidently seen service; while, suspended by a strap from his belt was a dirk of the same pattern, for closer quarters.

His mien was at once modest, masculine and dignified; but with a something in it, as well as in the rich bronze of his cheeks, that betrayed a more intimate acquaintance with the country than with the town.

Nature had been kinder to him than fortune; for his garments, as we have already insinuated, indicated that he was of a proud but worthy family, that sustained its position with difficulty, and therefore found it necessary to make the most of little.

The young man bent his steps toward the central part of the city, looking to the right and to the left for some intimation of lodgings to be let; but being unsuccessful in this respect, he at length turned toward the market-place in the lower part of the town, and was leisurely proceeding, when he was startled by loud shouts, as of a pursuing mob.

The next instant he heard, from a short distance, a woman's scream, upon which he quickened his steps, and was the next moment around the corner and in the market-place, when a young female, in the picturesque costume of a gipsy palmist or fortune-teller, pursued by a yelling crowd, bounded up

to him, like a frightened fawn, and throwing herself at his feet, cried with uplifted hands:

"Save me from those men—save me!"

"Rise," said the stranger, lifting her up. "No one shall harm you."

"Put her away, she is a sorceress!" roared the crowd, variously armed with clubs and staves, running up. "Put her away or take her fate!"

"Back, dastards!" shouted the young man, whipping out his sword. "Back, it is a woman, and touch her at your peril!"

"She is a sorceress. She has bewitched the King; put her away. Down with him; down with her—slay them both!" variously exclaimed the mob, furiously pressing forward.

"Take care," cried the stranger, with admirable coolness, to the nearest ruffians. "Mine is a Toledo blade—and you are pressing upon its point?" Then suddenly bringing the weapon around him with a sweep, he added, in a loud voice: "Stand back. I

a voice of thunder. "I am of Normandy, where it is an axiom, that he who strikes or will not defend a woman in danger is a coward, which no Norman ever yet was. Back, I say—back!"

"Right doctrine! I'm with you in that!" cried one of the mob, springing forward—a tall, double-jointed fellow, armed with a long heavy club, which he flourished as if it were but a whip. "I was a little hasty in joining the crowd, but I'm always open to right doctrine!"

"At them!" roared the throng. "Down with them—down!"

"Cowards, stand back!" threateningly exclaimed the Norman to the mob, who were pressing upon him on all sides. "Stand back, or, as I live, my Toledo shall drink your recreant blood."

A staff from some base hand at this moment grazed the top of his head, and carried off his hat. In an instant, such were the nearness and force of the projectile, that a line of blood darted down his forehead.

A shudder ran through the lady-visitor at the window, whose features became shrouded with a mortal paleness at the sight.

"Oh, brave sir, you are wounded, and for me," cried the poor palmist, with an expression of anguish.

"'Tis nothing—Mademoiselle—heed it not," returned the Norman. "A coward's hand hurled that staff!" he said, in a loud voice, at the same time lifting the gipsy with one arm, and with the other striving to cut a passage through the throng.

He used his long sword with vigor, and, in an incredibly short time, a dozen of the nearest ruffians staggered, bleeding, against those behind them, when the latter giving way, to avoid the like fate, many of them fell to the earth bleeding, like bulls under the knife of the butcher.

The conflict now became furious. The miscreants, finding that the staves oftener hit their own number than the Norman or his equally valiant double-jointed aid, ceased throwing them, as dangerous, and flourished only their clubs, with which, however, they made but poor work compared with the long sword of the Norman, which made its mark at every step, or with the long thick weapon of the friendly aid, who, guarding the rear of the gallant Norman and encouraging him with inspiring cries, laid about himself with a hearty goodwill that, while it cracked many crowns, made others ache for many a long day.

It was a stern fight; but

the Norman, who seemed to have the vigor, the endurance, and the heart of a lion, succeeded, at length, in cutting his way to the head of the market-place, where, as was customary, stood a number of soldiers, as a body-guard to the market-clerk, who here collected the daily tax of the butchers and hucksters and fish-women, as they passed to the market.

As the Norman and his aid came up, these quietly raised their guns to cover them from the mob, who, at this turn of affairs, and the further fact that many of them were worn out, others sore from the conflict, yet others severely bruised, and still others so desperately wounded as to require the surgeon, paused, shrank back, and finally concluded they had had enough.

"Hurrah for Normandy and me!" shouted the aid, throwing up his hat at this juncture. "We have



THISBE, THE PRINCESS PALMIST.

want air and room. Stand back, I say! Come, maiden," encircling her with his left arm, "there is no danger."

"Upon my life, I do believe the fellow thinks there is not!" observed, in a low tone, one of two young ladies, looking down from the window of a linen-draper's, at the scene, which they were watching with interest.

Her companion, evidently a visitor, for she still wore her hat, and who carefully veiled her face from public view, made no reply, but kept her eyes steadily upon the stranger, not a movement or word of whom escaped her.

"Put her away; she is a sorceress; an enemy of her kind. She has bewitched the King. Down with her, with him—down with them!" yelled the crowd, flourishing their clubs and staves.

"Back, I say—back!" shouted the young man, in

established the right doctrine, and made on several an impression which promises to be permanent. Hurrah for us—hurrah!"

"Thanks, my dear preserver, thanks," cried the palmist, snatching the Norman's hand before he could present it, and pressing it to her lips, "I owe my life to you. How can I repay it?"

"Speak of it not," said the young man, taking her in with his eye, for the first time. She was, perhaps, eighteen or nineteen years of age; had a petite but full and admirably rounded figure; a rich, dark-brown complexion; eyes of a lustrous black, that could flash lightnings in love or hate; a bold but exquisitely chiseled Roman profile; a queenly neck and bust; and wore over a yellow vest with topaz buttons, a black basque, open in front, and with short loose sleeves, with a Grecian border of pink satin, a skirt, reaching about midway between the knee and ankle, and with broad alternate blue and orange stripes, with narrower stripes between; scarlet stockings, ornamented with clocks, and showing a matchless leg and ankle; and buff-colored shoes, with glittering buckles, upon feet scarcely larger than a child's. In her ebony hair, which was of a gorgeous black, and hung about her neck in ringlets of sumptuous profusion, was thrust a long, black pin, with a top in the form of a plum of pure amethyst, which itself was set in a rose of carved gold. "Speak not of it," repeated the young man. "I have done this only as became a Norman gentleman, whose motto is 'Right and Fair Play.' But are you now safe, or shall I and our mutual friend, here—Your name, sir?"

"Jacques Fromage," answered the redoubtable double-jointed worthy, with a light laugh.

"Shall I and our mutual friend escort you to your abode?"

"No, I am safe. Many, many thanks!" answered the gipsy, in a voice as soft and musical as a cooing dove's, her dark, lustrous eyes looking the gratitude she could not speak. "I owe you my life, and know not how to acquit me of the debt. Stay, let me look at your hand!"

The Norman gave it to her.

"Can you, indeed, as some doubtless think, read one's fate, in the lines of his palm?" he added, with a pleasant smile.

But the gipsy had not heard him. She was already rapt in the examination of his hand.

"She can," said Jacques Fromage, answering for her, with a knowing wink. She has told friends of mine things they didn't believe any body but themselves knew, and she tells true, too."

"You have just come from a long journey," said the palmist, still looking at the young man, intently. "You came on a white horse. You not long since lost a good and generous friend—your mother—who, dying, left behind a husband, and you, who for a time, were inconsolable. Your father followed the profession of arms. He was a lieutenant, and is now a tiller of the soil on his own estate, which he works in person, for his health."

The Norman, whose brow grew grave, could scarcely restrain his astonishment.

"Didn't I tell you so!" cried Jacques Fromage, with a knowing wink, which was at the same time, one of triumph.

"Honor is yet in store for your father," pursued the gipsy. "While for yourself—"

She abruptly broke off, regarded the hand with careful attention, seemed after a time to be composed, when her cheeks suddenly changing from a deep flush to the whiteness of a sheet, she continued:

"For you trouble is in store; trouble, intrigue, mystery, suffering. A dark-complexioned woman will have influence against you; and a tall man, with gray eyes, will seek to give you to the headsman. But," still looking at his hand, "I see the headsman and the block; but the victim is not you. A woman's power is broken, also; for I see a distaff—the sign—lying in two pieces. That woman will seek to thwart your plans and damage your movements. For a time she will have power and prevail, but not always; for the distaff is in two pieces."

The Norman stared at the gipsy.

"It will all come to pass, just so," said Jacques Fromage, with a confident nod. "Mind I say so!"

"I see a woman weeping," pursued the gipsy. "She is in distress; and is constantly turning to you, in whom is her only hope. She is a wife, but whose," she continued, slowly, "I can not now make out."

"Some lady of rank, perhaps," suggested Jacques Fromage, who, regarding the Norman with immense admiration himself, saw nothing improbable in a duchess or countess falling in love with him also.

"She is a small woman," continued the gipsy, who, rapt in the study of the hand, had not heard him; "has only a few faithful friends, while dark-browed enemies, with hollow smiles, are about her on every hand. Even her nearest kin are among the most zealous of her foes. She spends the most of her time weeping."

"A small woman, surrounded by enemies, among whom are her nearest relatives!" muttered Jacques Fromage. "That ain't the right doctrine. I wonder who it can be!"

"You will be a friend to her—a great friend, as great as you have been to me," went on the gipsy. "But the man with the gray eyes will strive to crush both you and her, and will come very near to it, if not quite."

"A gray-eyed man," said Jacques Fromage, to the Norman, who was in doubt what to think of the palmist's, to him, singular statements. "The weeping lady's husband, perhaps! And no wonder, either," he added, to himself. "I should be jealous, too, of a handsome man like Normandy, if he came near my wife, which, fortunately for both him and me, he never will; for marriage and Jacques Fromage, who never had fine cousins of his own to bless himself with, wouldn't be the right doctrine."

"You will be often in great peril," pursued the gipsy, "but you have a long sword, a firm hand, and a brave heart, and you will not fall."

"Thanks for that," smiled the Norman.

"And from me, too," said Jacques Fromage, to himself, "for I shouldn't want to see the brave fellow go down."

"You will have a friend, too," said the gipsy; "a humble but courageous friend, on whom you can rely, and who will watch over you, as you will over the unhappy lady. When you are in danger from your enemies, he will deliver you; has wit, courage,

and great strength, and will employ them, for pure friendship's sake, in your defence."

"Like me, for instance," thought the double-jointed, and with a smile, "I'd fight for him without fee or reward, and think it one of the privileges which my honored father, Pierre, the wax maker, assures me are the property of every Frenchman."

"You set before me a banquet more gladsome than honey," said the Norman to the gipsy. "You tell me that I shall be of service to an unhappy I dy, and, most rare fortune, find a friend who will love me for myself!"

"The latter would not be at all astonishing," thought the aid, twirling his mustache. "For, see how I like him."

"You are poor and unknown, but you will attain wealth and distinction," said the palmist. "And—and—(her voice faltering)—you will be beloved, by a noble and beautiful woman, worthy of you."

"Why not?" mused the aid. "He is a spirited fellow, sides by instinct with right doctrine, and is brave as a lion."

"You promise me all that makes of life a joy," said the Norman, with an incredulous smile.

"But all that I have said will surely come to pass," said the gipsy, quickly. "It is written in these lines. My science is true, and I would not deceive—you, least of all. Did you not save my life?"

"It was my duty," said the Norman. "You are a woman, and were in peril. But in the flattering future you have drawn for me, it is your gratitude that speaks, not your knowledge."

"No," returned the gipsy. "It is not given to many to trace the lines of destiny; but to those to whom it is, the mystic language of the palm is plain as is at midnight the lustre of the stars."

"It may be," smiled the Norman.

"Believe me, it is," said the palmist. "I thank you once more for my life, and, and—farewell!"

"Not farewell," said the Norman, taking her hand.

"Whether I am a convert to your predictions or no, matters not. But these few moments have been pleasant, and happiness is worth the seeking. Where and when can I see you again?"

The gipsy, still allowing him to retain her hand, regarded him earnestly.

"I am a palmist, and therefore a public woman, whom every gross mind imagines it can address and insult with impunity. But there are also noble minds that, whatever they may think of the gipsy, always remember the respect due to the woman! Why do you wish to see me again?"

"Well put, by St. Nicholas!" mentally exclaimed Jacques Fromage. "It is evident that the little thing is aware that she already loves him, and that, knowing her danger, it is necessary to erect her defences. She is a brave girl!"

"Why do we wish to see those in whom we feel an interest?" said the Norman, in response to the palmist.

"Do you feel an interest in me?"

"What trembling hopes and fears lie in that question!" thought the aid.

"I do," replied the Norman.

"A man's or a gentleman's? There is a distinction!"

"Say neither. But a friend's. While I cannot forget that I am a man, I also remember that I am the son of a Norman gentleman, whose cheek would blush did he suppose me capable of aught unworthy."

The gipsy looked at him as if she could read him to the soul.

"Poor thing! She is still afraid to trust him, or rather herself!" dryly observed the aid.

"Where may I call upon you, and when?" repeated the Norman.

"I may not tell you now," returned the palmist, shaking her head with a sad smile, which yet was full of sweetness. "But you shall hear from me."

"How, when—where?"

"I cannot tell," said the gipsy, with an expression of anguish. "I am a child of fortune, and have to do as fortune wills. I am of a race, too, whose wanderings and uncertain life gives their lodge of to-day to others on the morrow. Your name?"

"Louis de Lemmonier."

"Mine is Thisbe. I may not tell you more. But you shall hear from me—perchance, at eventide. Do not look after me, nor follow. Farewell!"

With these words the gipsy hurried around the nearest corner, and disappeared.

"Thanks, friend, for your timely assistance and my hat," said the Norman, turning to Jacques Fromage and wringing his hand.

"Don't speak of it," said the aid, who, nevertheless, was delighted. "You are not long in Paris, I judge."

"Scarcely an hour. I was looking for a lodging-place when this occurred. Can you help me to one?"

"Say, rather, can I not? My father, Pierre the wax-maker, has the very thing; a front-room on the third floor, where on fete days you can see all the processions, and the fashionable passers-by, all the year round."

"Thank you, I will go with you, at once."

"Take my arm, then, and I will introduce you to the best father in all Paris. Come!"

As the young men set off, the bonneted visitor at the linen draper's, who, with her companion, looking up the market-place, had not taken her eyes from off the Norman for an instant, turned thoughtfully from the window.

She was about twenty years of age; of medium height; with a fine figure, easy in its movements and replete with dignity; a fair and dazzling complexion; dark eyes, in whose clear depths was visible a high and noble soul, impressed with a sense of responsibility, but yet full of woman's tenderness and high-strung feeling; and one of those fine Grecian heads which artists so love to paint in their Madonnas.

She was evidently out of place in the society of the linen draper's daughter, who, though trying to feel herself on an equality with her, only succeeded in making more painfully manifest to herself the broad line of distinction which nature, education and position had drawn between them.

Who was she, that we thus find ourselves drawing her portrait at the end of a chapter?

CHAPTER II.

EVENING came; but Louis de Lemmonier had heard nothing from the gipsy.

"She has probably been unable to discover my retreat, or she may be ill; or, perhaps some unlooked-for circumstance has transpired to prevent her keeping her word," he said, to himself, willing to excuse her. "Or, it may be, she has decided it is better on the whole to let the acquaintance so strangely begun, end just there. And yet," he added, drumming with his fingers on the table, "I would it were not so. She is worthy of a higher sphere than that in which she moves. She has virtue, wit, courage, intelligence—qualities that are wasted in her wandering life; and all superior natures ought to move in circles where they may continually ascend."

There was a tap at the door, and Jacques Fromage entered.

"Here is something for you, Normandy," he said, laying a note upon the table. "It came in an irregular way."

"How?" asked Louis.

"It was thrust under the hall-door, where I found it as I entered. It is from the palmist, I presume. You know she said you'd hear from her."

"I remember," said Louis, opening the paper, which, written in a fine hand, read thus:

"I cannot see you as soon as I thought. I am not my own mistress. A cruel destiny makes another the arbiter of my actions. When I can grant you an interview, I will, gladly. Till then think kindly, but never lightly, of me. Though a gipsy palmist, I am yet a woman, and have a woman's sense of honor. Have faith in what I told you. Every part of it will come to pass, believe it. I have a genius for reading the human palm. It is a gift, and I could not err, if I would. Beware, when you see him, as you surely will, of the gray-eyed man. You will know him by his eye, and his air of silken softness, which latter conceals the real nature of his approaches. You will hear from me again. I pray for you. THISBE."

Louis bowed his head upon his hands in thought.

"Do you mean that as a sign that you wish to be alone?" asked Jacques Fromage, with a smile. "If so, I'll retire."

And he offered, with a movement, to go.

"No; stay," said Louis, perceiving that he wished to talk, and willing enough to humor him, since he himself desired information. "You have been out?"

"Yes, down among the market-men, to learn the result of this morning's work, which is noised about through all the city. How many heads do you suppose were broken in the row?"

"I have no thought."

"And how many killed; that is, have since died?"

Louis shook his head.

"Four killed and thirty mangled," laughed the redoubtable Jacques, "of which latter, six are not expected to recover. The rest may with nursing."

"The affair was much more serious than I expected. Does it make much noise?"

"All Paris is ringing with it."

"It could not be helped," said Louis, after a thoughtful pause. "It is not in Norman blood to see a woman insulted, struck, or in peril, without making a manly struggle for her rescue. I am not sorry for the caittifs, for they brought their fate upon themselves. How chanced it they sought the palmist's life?"

"It were hard to tell," returned Jacques Fromage. "He is a wise man who can get at the bottom of a riot. But the surface appearance of the thing was this: Francis, our good King, who, between ourselves, though a married man, is a desperate fellow after the women—"

"What! the King?"

"Oh, a desperate fellow, and with no more idea of right doctrine in that respect than a quack has of regular medicine, a grocer of honesty, or a fish-woman of modesty. He is out, when well, every night in disguise, among the citizens' wives and daughters; now passing himself for a carpenter's journeyman, then as a lieutenant in the guards, afterward as a shopkeeper, at other times as a sailor, then again as a lawyer's or apothecary's clerk; till it has got to be a standing joke, whenever a stranger visits a citizen, to say, 'Your Majesty is very welcome!'"

"You amaze me!" exclaimed Louis. "Is this the example the King sets to his people?"

"Oh, he has a reply to all such reproofs. He says, 'if he sets 'em a good example during the day, that ought to be quite enough for 'em, it would for him if he were in their place!'"

The countenance of the Norman became grave.

"You were saying that his Majesty—"

"Lies, according to the giving out, very ill—perhaps from the club or fist of some indignant citizen, with whose wife or daughter he sought to make too free! But, (checking himself,) that is not the point. He lies very ill, and, rumor says, with the vile sorceries of some person whom it would be beneath his dignity to notice."

"Well?"

"This morning, the palmist, who is suspected of a deeper acquaintance with the unknown mysteries than would be for the interest of a Christian—"

"Stop!" said Louis. "Is she not a Christian?"

"Who can tell a gipsy's faith? Coming from the Lord knows where, and worshipping the Lord knows what, they—"

"Go on!" interrupted Louis, who did not sympathize with this sentiment.

"This morning, the gipsy, with her tambourine in her hand, came to the market-place, and commenced singing and dancing to the crowd, for the purpose of getting an audience on whom subsequently to exercise her palmistry, when, who should chance to glance at her but the butler of the Count De Bounier, who just then was haggling—for he is a mean man—with a butcher, for his morning's meat. As his eye fell upon the palmist, he started, and looked grave. Suddenly, turning toward the butcher, he excitedly exclaimed:

"As I live! there is the sorceress that has bewitched the King!"

"Who says that?" asked the butcher, looking first at the dancing palmist and then at the butler, in surprise.

"Her Majesty the Queen mother, all the court, everybody that ought to know," replied the butler.

"The rumor flew quickly through the market. From surprise the transition was rapid to indignation, which found vent in a cry of: 'Down with the cock-

atrice; down with the sorceress—down with her, kill her!"

"The palmist, though nearing in astonishment the tempest, had at first no suspicion that it had reference to herself. But in a moment, seeing the butchers, the fishermen, the hucksters, rushing toward her with vengeful looks, with stones, with clubs, she took alarm, when, dropping her tambourine, and uttering a loud scream, she darted, pale and fleet with terror, up the market-place. Fortunately, she had not sped far, when she beheld a man, with the bronze hue of the country on his cheek, and who had just turned a cross-street, coming toward her and—you know the rest."

"There is more in this than appears upon the surface," said Louis, gravely, after a few moments. "In whose service did you say the butler was?"

"The Count de Bounier."

Louis took out a pencil and tablet, and wrote down the name, for future reference.

"I see the gipsy is likely to find a champion," slyly observed Jacques Fromage.

"Who is the Count de Bounier?" asked Louis.

"A man of power—the King's companion in his night-adventures."

"Old or young?"

"Young; about thirty, and one of the most skillful swordsmen in all Paris."

"Normandy does not blanch at the latter fact," added Jacques, to himself.

"Is he single or married?"

"Married, of course. His establishment vies in splendor with the palace itself."

"He is rich, then?"

"I should think so, by St. Nicholas? since he owns whole streets of houses."

"Describe his personal appearance," said Louis. "I have an impression that I shall yet come in contact with him, perchance without knowing who he is, and I would be upon my guard?"

"That is but reasonable," said Jacques, with an inward smile. "Fancy a man, not tall, but still above the average, and neither stout nor thin, but a solid, compact, sinewy body, whose firm yet wiry air looks as if it could go through you in a fight, like the irresistible thrust of a knife. He is well-shaped withal, and shows well in a room, on horseback, and in the street. Add to this, that he is the best-dressed man in Paris, and you have him without mistake."

"Not quite," laughed Louis, "for you have yet yet given me any clue to the most important of all his features."

"Oh, true. Fancy a man with a thick shock of hair, black and lustrous as jet, and which hangs around him, down to his neck, in small natural curls; a complexion of pure yellow-white, like that of a young Spaniard; gray eyes, that to be in keeping ought to have been black and that when turned upon you, seem to be looking into, not at, you; an exquisitely-cut nose, like the beak of a hawk; lips that seem to have been made both for kissing women and breathing defiance to boldest men; and a chin coming forward to a handsomely-rounded point, and ornamented with a beard of a fine silken black, and of the same form. Could you recognize him now?"

"Probably. Large, gray eyes, you say?"

"Yes; that always seem to be looking into you, as if to read you inside-out."

Louis thought of the gray-eyed man spoken of by the gipsy.

"What business do you propose to follow?" asked Jacques, with a friendly smile, seeing that he had no more to ask concerning the Count de Bounier.

"I had thought of offering my service to the King," replied Louis.

"In what capacity?"

"That of a man-of-arms. Though I am not particular, providing the service is such as can be followed by a gentleman who has been trained to a high regard for honor. Think you there is any prospect at court?"

"I have no idea; I never go there," smiled Jacques. "But there could be no harm in your making a trial: though I have my doubts whether you can see the King without some influence other than your own. Did you bring any letters?"

"Two—one to my father's old commander, the Chevalier Devaux, Captain of the King's First Regiment of Horse; the other to Monsieur de Charenton, Vice-General of the finances."

The countenance of Jacques became sober. "How long since your father served?" he asked.

"Twelve years."

"How long since he was last in Paris?"

"Seven years."

"He never corresponded with the Chevalier Devaux, Monsieur de Charenton, or any one else in Paris, I suppose?"

"No. But why do you ask?" inquired Louis, in surprise.

"I don't wish to hurt your feelings," returned Jacques; but Normandy is a long way from Paris, and if one does not hear the news, one is apt to think that things always remain the same, which they don't in Paris."

"You are preparing me for a surprise. Has anything happened to one or both these gentlemen?"

"Only what comes to all. The Chevalier Devaux died five, and Monsieur de Charenton three years ago."

"My innocent father!" inly exclaimed Louis. "In that case, I must make my own way," he remarked aloud, with a grave smile.

"Yes," said Jacques, sorry for him. "But, don't be discouraged. You will do it. Brave blood always finds friends and openings."

"Do you think so?"

"I never knew it to fail. Besides, I have an idea the affair of to-day will tell for you. I don't know how or why. But it was a brave and manly act on your part; and my father, Pierre, the wax-maker, says a noble action never passed unobserved or unrewarded."

"We will see," said Louis, smiling.

"Besides," said Jacques, "think what good fortune the palmist predicted for you. You smile, but it will all come out true. The gipsy has been around Paris these three years, in which time I've known more than twenty instances that have transpired as she foretold."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, Sir; she is no common gipsy. She is as she told you; she has a gift for her science. I don't pretend to understand it; I am not sure she does herself; but it is certain her predictions always come out true, and to the letter. Even my father, Pierre, the wax-maker, who is not wont to believe without evidence, gives in at mention of Thisbe, the palmist, and says she is a strange being, but whose statements, private and professional, may be relied upon."

"We will see," replied Louis, rising;

"What is the hour?"

"Nine."

"I will walk out awhile. Your intelligence concerning those to whom I had designed to introduce myself to-morrow has startled me, and I propose to walk it down. I will return in an hour."

As he went out, he observed, on the opposite side of the street, a man, who had apparently been looking up at his window, suddenly wheel round, and bend his steps in the same direction he himself was going.

"A spy, perhaps," he said to himself; "but surely not on me, who have been in Paris only a few hours. Nevertheless, I will keep an eye on him."

After proceeding some distance, he purposely stopped to look in at a jeweler's window; upon suddenly turning, he discovered the man, who was watching him steadily from the opposite pathway, start quickly, and move on again, in confusion.

"Well," he ejaculated; "if the fellow is after me, I have my Toledo, and he is free to advance as soon as it is pleasure to do so."

The spy, however—if spy he was—did not evince any such intention. On the contrary, he carefully kept a respectful distance, until Louis entered a public park facing the Palace of Justice, which was thronged with promenaders, when, pausing a few moments to exchange a few words with a man dressed like himself, standing near the main gate, he hurried off.

As he disappeared, the man to whom he had spoken, turned slowly upon his heel, and entered the park, also at a slow walk; but, singularly enough, keeping his eye closely upon Louis, whom, keeping carefully, as he hoped, out of range of the latter's sight, he followed, with the soft stealthiness of a cat.

Louis, however, was of Normandy, whose inhabitants, as all the world know, were famous for always understanding the move-

ments of their enemies; and he smiled at the man's gratuitous pains to avoid his observation.

"One would almost think," he mentally observed, seating himself on a bench, at the side of the main walk, "I was on the point of an adventure. Fortunately, in case of attack, I have, besides my father's well-tryed sword, my father's dagger, in the use of both of which, thanks to my honored father's teaching, I have a fair degree of knowledge."

And now another incident occurred.

On seeing Louis seat himself, the spy, fixing the locality in his mind, turned about, and made his way through the promenaders back to where he had started, where, however, he had scarcely arrived, when he was rejoined by the other, who was at this time accompanied by a woman, in a domino and mask.

As they approached, he turned again into the park, and walked before them, without a word, to where he had mentally impressed to Louis's situation, who was still sitting as he had left him, and to whom he called their attention, without gesture, in these words:

"Over there, on the bench, under the tree."

"Tis well," said the mask; "you have had your instructions."

The man bowed, with an air of deep respect, and fell behind the lady, who, mingling with the throng, moved round to the main path, in the direction of the Norman, toward whom she slowly advanced.

As she approached the bench, the two men drew up on the side of the path, and affecting to be observing only the passers-by, followed her carefully with their eyes.

Whatever the aim or errand of the mask, when within a few yards of the bench, her heart temporarily failed her; but murmuring to herself, "Courage, courage!" she continued to advance, though not with the same firm tread she had exhibited hitherto.

At the last moment, however, her spirit returned; for, on reaching the bench, she boldly seated herself at the side of Louis, and, laying a small gloved hand upon his arm, exclaimed, in a voice that thrilled him in every nerve:

"Sir, pardon me; but a persecuted and unhappy lady stands greatly in need of a brave man's help, and I have come to ask if you will grant it, with the same noble impulse that you did to the gipsy palmist, in the market-place, this morning?"

The voice fell on the ear like gushing melody, and raptured every sense.

CHAPTER III.

At the question of the mask, related at the close of the preceding chapter, the prediction of the gipsy palmist arose before the Norman, and began immediately to assume dignity and proportion.

He recalled also Jacques' presentiment, and, under the influence of both these thoughts, a singular feeling came over him, which, however, was almost instantly overpowered by the delicious magnetic tones of the lady's voice, which electrified him with a pleasing delight, in every muscle.

There are voices that tell of frankness, truth, nobleness; and whose every tone, when in health, is like a wave of music, because the truth and sweetness of their owner's nature dwell in the depths of their voice as in the depths of their mind.

The voice of the mask was of this description; and Louis felt that it was that of a woman of education, feeling, and refinement, and who, to her other virtues, added truth, tenderness, and devotion.

But all this, which has taken us several minutes to describe, flashed through the young man's mind in an instant, and he said, in answer to the interrogatory of the mask:

"I am a Norman, Madame, and therefore could not refuse assistance to any one in peril or in pain."

"Thanks, Sir, thanks," cried the unknown. "I knew, I felt, that such would be your reply."

"You 'knew', 'felt' it, Madame! Have you seen me before?"

"I have."

"Pardon me, Madame, but I have been in Paris only a few hours, and am known only to three persons—my landlord, his son, and the palmist, to whom you have alluded."

"Pardon me, Sir," returned the mask, playfully; "but there is not a fireside in Paris where you are unknown, from that of the

palace, where your gallant rescue of the gipsy girl is to-night the only theme, to that of the meanest hovel."

"You are determined, Madame, I see, to put me on good terms with myself. Are you a native of Paris?"

"Of Burgundy, Sir."

"But you have lived in Paris some years?"

"Since childhood."

"Does the unhappy lady reside in the city, also?"

"Yes, Sir."

"Who is she?"

"That I may not tell," said the unknown, with visible embarrassment."

"Where does she live?"

"Neither can I inform you of that."

"Very good," said Louis. "You may have a good reason, and I shall not urge it. Your own name, then?"

"I must be silent upon that, too."

"Tis well, Madame. Your residence, then?"

"I must reply to that question as to the others, at least for the present; and I am sure you are too much of a gentleman to think ungenerously of me for it, or to refuse my request because circumstances render it necessary for me to be less explicit than I would."

"You have judged me correctly. I recognize your claim as a lady to any service in my poor power, consistent with honor; and when it is performed, your woman's right to dismiss me without allowing me to see your features, or acquainting me with your name. But, pardon me, how shall I be able to render any aid to the unhappy lady you refer to, unless I go to where she is; and how can I learn that, if it be not told me?"

"I have prepared for that obstacle, Sir," said the mask.

"Then I must say, Madame, you are as ingenious as ingenuous."

"You will judge better of that, when I have unfolded to you my plans."

"Oh! indeed. What is it?"

"To lead you thither blindfolded!"

"Madame," said Louis, in surprise, who began to thank there was such a thing as carrying one's politeness too far.

"You refuse, Sir?" said the mask, as if pained.

Louis was irresolute, but it was only for an instant.

"No, Madame, I do not," he replied, touched by the distress manifest in her changed voice. "A Norman, and therefore without fear, and believing you to be a lady, I will submit uncomplainingly to your wish, and go with yourself, or whomsoever you may designate, confidently, and in honor."

"Had I had any doubts of your high intents, your right to the name of a gentleman," she gratefully exclaimed, in a voice quivering with emotion, "your nobleness in this would have dispelled them. Have equal confidence in me, and feel assured that it will not be abused."

"I have confidence, Madame."

"Thanks, thanks, in the name of my unhappy friend, who, believe me, is a lady of high honor, and my own."

"What is the nature of the service called for by your friend?"

"That she herself will tell you."

"Then I shall see her?"

"No. My idea is, that when you leave the park you will be met by a man who will offer you a silken bandage, which you will put on without a word. Is that satisfactory?"

"Perfectly, Madame."

"To guard against all danger to the lady's incognito, the man who will give you the bandage will not be one of her friends or servants, whom she does not wish to compromise or have known, but a person selected from the passing crowd."

"Pardon me, Madame. But the lady is taking extraordinary precautions! Of whose devising is the plan?"

"Mine, Sir."

"Then I have nothing to urge against it. Excuse my interruption. I am to put on the bandage. What then?"

"Two men will come up, who will place themselves on either side of you, and lead you without a word to a court, up which they will proceed, till they come to a door at which they will knock, and then retire, leaving you alone."

"Then?"

"The door will open, and you will feel a woman's hand upon your shoulder, and hear a whispered 'Come!'"

"Pardon me," said Louis. "But who will utter the whisper?"

"The owner of the hand upon your arm."

"Doubtless. But whom will she be?"

"That you must not even guess."

"The woman will lead you by the hand up a private staircase, thence along a passage, thence up a second staircase, thence ten steps to an apartment, the door of which will open at your approach, and close upon your entrance."

"I have it all in my mind."

"Once in the apartment, you will continue to advance till your conductor withdraws her hand, when you will instantly stand still, and wait till you are addressed."

"Pardon. But who will address me?"

"The unhappy lady."

"No one else?"

"No one."

"Pardon, again. The arrangement is imperfect."

"How so?" said the mask, in surprise.

"From this hour, I shall be insensible to every voice but one; and after the unhappy lady has spoken, I ought to hear that one."

"You mean the palmist's?"

"Why hers?"

"You saved her life, and therefore must feel an interest in her. Besides, there are few in Paris so lovely; then, too, though a gipsy, her reputation is pure as the untainted snow."

"I do not mean the gipsy's voice, Madame."

"No? Whose, then?"

"If you cannot guess, no matter!" said Louis, in an affected pet. "I shall not insist upon hearing it."

"You are angry," said the unknown, observing him with attention.

"I had only hoped to hear a second voice after the unhappy lady has spoken; that is all. But you say I shall not, and so—"

"I have not said that."

"Excuse me. I thought you did."

"No. You will then hear a second voice."

"Ah! Whose?"

"Have I not already told you you must not even guess?" said the mask, playfully.

"But if I should recognize it?"

"You must not!" said the mask, with feeling.

"Then I will not!" said Louis, generously.

"Thanks. You have put me out again with your impatience."

"Ah! if you only knew how much you have put me out. I, who was never put out before!" said Louis, with an unconscious sigh.

"Sir, I almost fear you are taking advantage of my having sought your assistance!"

"You do not mean that, Madame!" said the young man, quickly.

"Perhaps I do not!" replied the mask, softened at the sight of a great round tear which had leaped to his lids unhidden. "Where was I?"

"At the second voice, which I was not to recognize."

"That voice will say to you, 'This way!'"

"No more?"

"Is not that enough?"

"Perhaps, then! For the unhappy lady will be present. But at the foot of the stairs! I mean at the door opening out into the court!"

"What then?"

"Who can tell! What do ladies usually say to gentlemen at the door?"

"Good-night!"

"Ahem! Nothing more?"

"It may be, the one who leads you down will add 'Thanks!' from a grateful heart."

"And shake hands with me!"

"You are exacting!"

"Oh, lady, say not so!" said the young man with emotion. "I am only a poor Norman gentleman, with no other fortune than my sword, it is true; and it may be, therefore, unworthy of the notice or the friendship of one so gentle, beautiful, and highborn. But he who gives his holiest and best sympathies without thought of power or reward, is surely on a level with the objects of his service, and therefore entitled to their best feelings, were they among the highest!"

The unknown was silent. It may be she was weighing his sentiment; perhaps think-

ing of the man. Who knows? For who can tell the language of a face or eye he cannot see, or the sensitivities of a breast whose workings are invisible?

"How know you the lady is either beautiful or highborn?" she asked, presently, in a tone far from firm.

"How feel we the beauty of the nightingale when we hear the music of its song, or the rank in nature of her who walks a queen among the throng?"

"A queen!" said the unknown, agitated.

"Oh, lady! there are queens by nature, surpassing in true worth and beauty all that ever wore the diadem of empire; and when they go abroad to mingle with their kind, they do not need trumpeters to shout, 'Lo! there comes the royal!' for all appreciating hearts see them and do homage!"

"I will shake hands with you!" said the unknown, warmly, taking off her glove. "But you need not press it quite so hard!"

"Pardon. I am a Norman; but I'll improve, so you will but give me time!"

"O!" said the unknown, with a low sigh, like a gush of music. "For what?"

"To improve!" returned Louis. "I am country now, but I'll be city by-and-by."

"And forget you are a Norman!" said the unknown, archly.

"Never!" rejoined Louis, whose voice had an honest, manly ring. "I am proud of my old Norman hills; proud, too, of her green fields, her fair women, and brave men. She was ever to me a kind, if frugal, mother; giving me wholesome nourishment from her mountain-streams, in whose depths I in boyhood learned to dive, and in lusty strokes contest with its startled finny coursers the honors in the race; from her high hills and craggy steep, up which I from a boy have climbed and ran, till every muscle grew firm and hardy as the rocks themselves and as insensible to pain; and from her broad, verdant fields, in which I have rollicked and shouted till every sense banqueted on laughing joy. Forget I am Norman! Yes, when memory herself dies out, but not till then! But we have wandered. The lady will shake hands before dismissing me at the door!"

"Yes, as I did but now."

"I knew she would. You but jested when intimating she would send me off with a bare good-night."

"Did I intimate that?"

"I will not say you did, but that I think you did; and not even that, if you will shake hands again."

"There. Gently; you hurt my hand."

"It was your ring, not me. See, I press it now, without hurting it, which is proof it was the ring. But at the door, what?"

"The same two men will meet and lead you, blindfold, back to whence they took you."

"Tis well. When is it you wish to have me start?"

"Now, if you will."

"Nay, it shall be as you wish. Shake hands once more."

"Nay, hush!"

"Well, if you will have it so! Where will the bandage be handed to me?"

"Without the park, on the walk, facing the north gate."

"Tis well. Adieu!"

CHAPTER IV.

Louis, lifting the ungloved hand of the lady to his lips, bowed gracefully, and moved away among the throng.

In a few minutes he reached the gate, through which he had but barely passed, when a man stepped up to him with a black silken kerchief, which he handed to him, saying:

"Excuse me, Sir. But you have dropped this."

Louis thanked him, and walking under a tree, drew the kerchief over his eyes.

As he accomplished this, two men, who had been watching him from an adjoining tree, came up, and without a word, placed themselves on his either side, took each an arm in theirs, and gave a forward impulse, on feeling which, Louis at once strode forward.

In twenty minutes or so, he heard an echoing murmur, and he comprehended that he was walking in the court, when, drawing him up to the left, the men suddenly withdrew their arms from his, tapped three times at a door, and retreated.

When their footsteps had ceased to resound, the door turned softly upon its hinges, and Louis felt a soft hand take his, and draw him forward, and heard at the same instant, in a low but clear whisper:

"Raise your foot, a single step. Come!"

"Good," he muttered to himself, in an ecstasy of delight. "I do not recognize the voice, but I feel the ring. 'Tis she!"

His conductress led him along a few steps, and then whispered:

"We are at a staircase. Raise your foot."

"It is some nobleman's mansion," said the young man, mentally. "The floor, soft as elder-down, returns no sound."

In a moment he was in a passage on the second floor, along which his guide led him to a second stair-flight, up which they ascended to a third hall, where the Norman's nostrils were immediately saluted with an odoriferous perfume, which after a few steps very considerably deepened, and he became satisfied that he was in a luxurious apartment.

When he had walked forward a few paces, his conductress suddenly withdrew her hand, when, remembering his instructions, he instantly lowered his arms at ease, and stood stock-still.

In a few moments he heard a rustling of silk, and the next instant he inhaled a different kind of perfume from that which pervaded the apartment, and he felt that some high-born lady, accustomed to the luxuries of refinement, was standing a step or two off, and attentively observing him.

Presently, a plaintive voice, its tones youthful, silvery and distinct, fell mildly on his ear, saying,

"Do you know where you are, Sir?"

"I do not, Madame," he replied.

"Or who it is that addresses you?"

"Only that it is a lady, and, by the plainness of her voice, an unhappy one."

"Should she desire it, are you at her service?"

"She may command me, Madame."

"Without reservation?"

"In all things in honor."

"Who are you, Sir?" said the voice, in a tone that showed its owner was pleased with his reply.

"Louis de Lemmonnier, of Ferat, Normandy, which I left twenty days since, with my father's blessing, and high hopes, though I entered Paris with forty crowns."

"Who is your father?"

"Adrian de Lemmonnier, Count of Ferat, and Fourth-Lieutenant under the Chevalier Devaux, of the King's First Regiment of Horse."

"You are the son of a gallant man, Sir. I am familiar with the fame of the Count of Ferat, whose heroic valor at the siege of Milan, recorded in the state archives, elicited from our army general bursts of admiration."

"You are very polite, Madame!" cried Louis, grateful for the tribute to the reputation of his father, for whom he had an exalted love and reverence. "How can I serve you?"

"Let us talk of yourself first. What has brought the son of so worthy a gentleman as the Count of Ferat to Paris?"

"To push his fortunes, Madame."

"One would have thought the son of a gentleman of so wide a fame as that of the Count of Ferat would find his fortune all ready at his hand."

"And therein would lie a very great mistake."

"Indeed. Is not the Count a gentleman of wealth?"

"Quite the contrary."

"You surprise me, Sir."

"I regret it Madame, for your sake and my father's. While following his profession of arms, the Count's affairs were managed overwell, got into bad disorder, and—I must say it—decay; so that, when, thirty days since, I was meditating upon the condition of our station, I suddenly said to the Count, 'Father, we need money; I'll to Paris, and try to make it; if I fail, the estate will hold out while you live!' 'And you—if you—fail!' said the Count, his cheek turning pale, for he loves me with a large heart. 'If I fail, Sir,' said I, 'I shall need no estate—larger than six small feet of earth.' The Count hoped for better, and so in truth did I, and do still: for I shall make the money!"

"Have you any prospect?"

"No, Madame."

"Friends?"

"No friends."

"Whence, then, do you look for fortune?"

"No particular direction. It will come from where it will."

"Have you applied for service?"

"To whom should I apply, Madame?"

"The King, of course. Are you not a nobleman?"

"I have no one to present me."

"The son of the Count of Ferat needs no patron. His father's name is influence enough."

"You flatter me, Madame."

"No, I do not. The fame of the Count of Ferat is one of the glories of the state."

"In your mind, perhaps."

"In that of France, the King, the court."

"Madame, you are filling me with vanity. I had not supposed my father's name had ever been heard of outside of his regiment, and still less, that it should ever reach his Majesty."

"Your thought deceived you, Sir. Take courage, therefore."

"But, Madame, you have not yet told me in what way I can be of service to you?"

"We will come to that, presently. I have no wish to pry into your affairs, but from the remark you made, that you had entered Paris without so much baggage as a lady could press into her glove, I infer that the suit you have on is your only one?"

"Precisely."

"You will need a better one in which to present yourself before the King, before whom you ought to appear in a dress worthy the son of the gallant Count of Ferat. Reach out your hand."

"For what?"

"That is my affair, I think, Sir."

"No Madame, it is mine, if, as I suspect, you design to offer me money. Though poor, I am yet a gentleman, and can receive no one's charity. I am a Norman, too; and what I eat and wear I must earn, like an honest and an honorable man!"

His interrogator was dumb a few moments, as if in surprise.

"Yet take it," continued the voice, "if not as a gift, then as a loan, which, if you so desire, you can at any time return."

"Pardon," returned the Norman, "but I must decline. I do not know whom I am addressing; may never appear before you again, and, if I did, I should not recognize you; or, if I recognized you, I am bound in honor not to admit it; and if I were released from that, and recognized you, I might not have the means to return the money. Therefore, Madame, if you please, we will say nothing more about it, but come at once to the main purpose of this interview."

"You are right, Sir," said the voice, evidently pleased with this high proof of his delicate sense of honor. "It is time we came to that. You have made no application for service in any quarter, you say, and are utterly free?"

"Wholly, Madame."

"'Tis well, Sir. Present yourself to-morrow to the King, who, be assured, will be found easily accessible, upon your announcing your name?"

"Easily accessible," said Louis, in surprise. "I had heard the contrary, and that it is usual—"

"The son of so eminent a soldier as the Count of Ferat does not come under the customary rules. The King will give you a flattering reception, and perhaps invite you to enter his service, which, however, you must decline."

"Decline, Madame! when to enter his Majesty's service is the dearest wish of my heart? You cannot be serious."

"I am serious."

The Norman was mystified and perplexed.

"But, Madame, his Majesty may require to know why I decline, in which case, what shall I say?"

"That you are already in service."

"Which will not be true, and therefore I cannot say it."

"It will be true."

"Madame, you are bewildering me!"

The voice made no reply.

"Pray, Madame, if it will be true, in whose service am I?"

"Minel! Have you not offered yourself to me?"

"Very good, Madame. But his Majesty will probably ask in whose."

"You will say you are in the Queen's Musketeers."

"The Queen's Musketeers!" repeated the young man, in astonishment. "I have heard of the King's Guards, but never of the Queen's Musketeers. Is there such a corps?"

"There is not."

"Then I shall tell a lie, which—pardon me—I can not."

"You will not tell a lie."

"But I understood you to say there is no such corps."

"There is not, Sir. But that does not argue that there will not be."

"True. That is a consideration of a very different complexion. Has his Majesty in view a corps of that description?"

"He has not."

"The lady is making game of me," thought Lewis. "But, Madame," he said aloud, "in case such a corps were established, it by no means follows I should be willing to take service under its Captain, who, though possibly a fine commanding officer, after all might not suit me, who am very particular under whom I serve, inasmuch as promotion—a very important consideration with individuals whose ambition is larger than their purse—very often depends upon it. Were it in the King's Guards, now—"

"You will be pleased with the Captain of the Queen's Musketeers, I assure you, Sir," said the voice.

"But, Madame, I do not think any one can assure me of that but Louis de Lemmonier himself."

"I repeat it, Sir; you will be as pleased with the Captain as with yourself."

"Madame, permit me to ask a, to me, important question. Do the Musketeers draw any pay?"

"By all means; the privates fifty, and the Captain one hundred crowns a month."

"From his Majesty's Treasurer?"

"From her Majesty's."

"The Queen has a separate treasurer, then?"

"Have I not said so?"

"True. But, having never before heard such a fact, the relation of it now takes me by surprise. His name, if I may be so bold?"

"Mademoiselle Adrienne de Bowmonville."

"I am in a dream, or else in a madhouse!" mentally exclaimed the Norman.

"Pardon, Madame; but I think you said her Majesty's Treasurer was a woman?"

"I did."

"Some old toothless virago, who, unable longer to hold her position in society as a woman, has taken to one of the occupations of the other sex, and therefore is more difficult to get along with than any man."

"An amiable young lady, not yet twenty, of spotless name, of surpassing beauty, and the bosom-friend of her Majesty."

"You said but now that the Queen's Musketeers drew, the privates fifty, and the Captain a hundred crowns per month?"

"I did. Is there aught strange in that?"

"Only this. That his Majesty's Guards draw but ten, and the Captain only forty crowns a month."

"So much the better for the Musketeers."

"True, Madame, if it be true. Fifty crowns a month! It is a fortune!"

"So much the better for those in the corps."

"True, again. But I think it is not started yet," said the young man, half in irony.

"It will be, however. Rest content with that."

"The duties of a Musketeer, Madame, if I may be so bold?"

"The duties of a Guardsman?"

"To watch over, defend, and hold himself subject to the orders of the King."

"You have defined the duties of a Musketeer, Sir; only, instead of the King, it is his business to watch over the fame, safety, and happiness of the Queen."

"That is the duty of his Majesty, Madame."

"His Majesty," replied the voice, with a slight faltering, "does not think with you in that respect."

Louis thought of what Jacques Fromage had told him concerning the King's infidelities.

"I see, Madame," he said. "But if his Majesty, who, as I had already heard, is not so true or respectful to her Majesty as he might

be, then it is the duty of every gentleman at court to be doubly watchful of her safety, and in their respect."

"Alas, Sir," said the voice, as if in pain, "the Queen does not dispense favors, but the King!"

"I see," said Louis, indignantly. "And therefore—"

"Therefore, since his Majesty forgets his respect for the Queen, her Majesty has no one to stand up for her at court, where the King's last lady-favorite has more importance and greater influence than she."

"Does her Majesty love the King?"

"Why do you ask, Sir?"

"I have often heard it said by my honored father, the Count of Ferat, that any wife with a truant husband has it in her power to bring him back to her side, and drive out forever from his heart all desire to wander."

"How, Sir?"

"By kindness, respect, and making herself agreeable to him. Love begets love; and a wife who would retain, after marriage, the confidence and affection of her lord, must herself exhibit what she would see in him."

"Alas! Sir, the King gives her Majesty no opportunity to show him how she loves him. For weeks and months at a time, he never visits her apartments; and when by chance he meets her, he turns his eyes away, or else regards her with a frown, and passes on, to give his smiles and attentions to some unworthy favorite, who, when she sees the Queen, often impudently stares at her with a smile, brazen and glittering with triumph."

"And his Majesty permits this?"

"It is unknown to him, and, indeed, who is to tell him? The Queen herself? Alas! her Majesty rarely or never meets him except in public, and his favorites alone have his ear."

"Does his Majesty never visit her apartments?"

"Never! His days are given to public affairs, his nights to dissolute companions, who take advantage of his fondness for gay adventure to lead him in evil."

"So that her Majesty is, as it were, ostracised, and cut off from the dignity, the influence, and the happiness due to her as a woman and a queen?"

"Yes, Sir."

"Alas, poor lady!"

"You pity her?"

"From my heart, Madame, and would that I could help her. Alas! that one who is so well beloved by all her subjects that they affectionately term her 'our good Queen', should be so unhappy!"

"Do they call her Majesty that?" asked the voice, touched.

"Everywhere. Did you not know it, Madame?"

"No, Sir," returned the voice, in emotion. "And she is beloved, too?"

"So warmly, that were the cause of her unhappiness but known, there is scarce a sword in the kingdom that would not leap from its scabbard to do her right."

"She has friends, then, in the people. O joy! O rapture! She had feared that, with the alienated affections of the King, she had lost also the love and confidence of France?"

"So far from that, Madame, were it aware of her suffering, the nation would rise as one man to avenge her, and cheerfully die fighting in her cause."

The Norman heard a sound as if his interlocutor had burst into tears.

"This intelligence, Sir," said the voice, presently, in a tone that informed the Norman it was accompanied by a sweet but sad smile, "will be gratefully remembered by her Majesty, in whose name I thank you, the first to bring it to her ears. You appear to be meditating?"

"I was thinking, Madame, how I could serve this poor Queen, to bring back happiness to whom I would die."

"Her Majesty will not forget your kind regards, Sir. Accept in her name this ring!"

"Pardon, Madame, I can accept of nothing from so unhappy a lady, till I have first made a manly effort in her cause."

"But, Sir—"

"Pray, no more. Will you be frank with me?"

"Assuredly."

"Under whose command will be the Musketeers?"

"That of their Captain, who will receive

his orders from the Queen's Treasurer, who will receive them from her Majesty."

"They will form, then, no part of the regular army?"

"No."

"Will be subject in nowise to the King or any of his officers?"

"They will be subject to the orders only of their Captain."

"One word more—their object?"

"The Queen, long slighted, neglected, treated with indifference by the King, and with disrespect by the dissolute of the court, has thought it best, by the counsel of her own judgment, and that of her bosom-friend, to make an effort for the recovery of her dignity and the affections of her lord."

"Good; bravo!" said the Norman, his features kindling with enthusiasm.

"To this end, she needs friends whose presence, courage, and devotion, will give to her throughout the struggle a moral support, which will check those who, under the influence of enemies and rivals, may seek to overawe and neutralize her efforts. These friends she looks for in her Musketeers."

"Alas, poor lady! has she none others on whom she can count?"

"Save her bosom-friend, none," faltered the voice.

"Here, at least, is one who from this hour will devote himself to the service of his Queen. So tell her Majesty, Madame; and also that he will make her friends his friends, and her foes his foes—would she but let him know them—till she reigns once more paramount queen of her lord's affections, court, and throne!"

There was a sobbing sound, and the Norman felt that the owner of the voice had again been overcome by her feelings.

"When does her Majesty design to make her effort, Madame?" he asked, presently.

"To-morrow."

"Then she doubtless wishes to be supported by the presence of her friends?"

"By her Musketeers—yes, who will assemble at three o'clock in the royal antechamber, to pay honor as she passes to the throne-room."

"Pardon, Madame. But the uniform?"

"To-morrow, as they will. After that, as her Majesty's Treasurer shall direct."

"They are to appear armed—yes?"

"With a musketoon, sword, and dirk; and will follow her Majesty into the throne-room, to nerve her with their presence, and to check with their eyes the hitherto unbridled gestural insolence of the parasites of the King."

"Tis well, Madame. I give you my word that one at least will do his duty in those particulars. Where are to be the quarters of the Musketeers?"

"Where they themselves shall determine, providing they are at the palace from two to four in the afternoon and from dusk to nine in the evening."

"At the palace, Madame? What! all the company?"

"The Captain and privates, Sir."

"They would fill it, to the exclusion of everybody else," muttered the Norman.

"But it is none of my business. If the Musketeers were ordered to take possession of the throne-room itself, it would be their duty to obey." Then, addressing the voice, he inquired: "In what part of the palace are they to take their station, Madame?"

"In the royal antechamber, till the Queen appears, when they are immediately to follow, and watch over her till she retires."

"Do you speak this, Madame, by authority?"

"In the name of her Majesty."

"Enough, Madame. To-morrow, at two o'clock precisely, at least one Musketeer will be at his post in the royal ante-chamber. Have you anything further to say to me?"

"Only to tender you the thanks of a grateful woman for your generous kindness in coming up thus promptly to the help of your Queen. Good night, Sir."

"Good night, Madame."

The next instant, the Norman felt a small, soft hand, whose touch thrilled him like an ecstasy, take his to lead him from the apartment. He recognized it, as before by a ring on the forefinger, but was too honorable to permit the discovery to appear.

On reaching the door, his conductress, giving him both her hands, said, in a whisper, whose tone was gushing, genial, and whole-hearted:

"Thanks, Sir, for your loyalty to the Queen. Be brave, and prosper."

She pressed his hands, hastily and laughingly withdrew hers from his as, in a thrill of delirium, he was raising them to his lips, and quickly opening the door, gently pushed him out, with a low, silvery "Good night."

His feet had scarcely touched the flat stone pavement of the court, when he felt himself between two men, who took him by the arm, without a word, marched him off for a considerable distance, when they suddenly released him.

He waited honorably till their retreating footsteps were no longer audible, and then took off the bandage.

He was under the same tree, outside the park, near the north gate, from whence he had been taken.

It was all like a dream!

CHAPTER V.

The next day was an important one to our hero. On rising, he felt that it was in a measure to be the turning-point in his life.

"I shall go up or down, forward or behind," he observed to himself; "therefore let me show myself a true Norman, and worthy the blood of the Count of Ferat. Let me act with intelligence and courage!"

He rose early; for he had many things to do, and but little to do it with; that is to say, he had forty crowns, which, with his sword and dirk, the hat upon his head, the suit of brown upon his back, and the boots upon his feet, comprised his worldly all.

The great question with him, then, was how to lay out these forty crowns to the greatest advantage. For it will be readily understood that the suit of brown, though respectable enough for Normandy, where the same clothes did very well for a series of years, was not exactly the thing for Paris, and still less for court.

For, in the first place, it was five years behind the fashion; next, it was threadbare, with long and careful brushing—and last of all, it showed here and there the genius of his father's housekeeper for darning; three facts which, while they bore testimony to the three excellent qualities of modesty, carefulness, and economy, yet were not calculated to add to one's dignity at court.

"Besides," argued Louis; "the poor Queen must not be ashamed of her Musketeers, who, she must feel, are the peers of the best dress of the King's Guards. She ought to feel proud of them, and to gather strength for her struggle from the elegance and moral stateliness of their appearance. Besides, my costume ought to do honor to the Count of Ferat, whose cheek must not be made to blush at the first appearance at court of his son!"

This was the argument of good blood, spiced up with proper pride.

"But," continued the Norman, "whether to lay out the whole forty crowns or not, is a question. Let me see; for fifteen I can get a suit worthy of a lord, but for twenty-five one fit for a prince. A lord is nobody, a prince somebody; therefore, let us be a prince, which disposes at once of twenty-five of the forty, and leaves us only a bare fifteen, with which to get along till her Majesty's Treasurer shall, in her goodness, see fit to give her Musketeers something with which to shield them from starving. Thank fortune, I have in my pocket my landlord's receipt for a quarter's rent in advance, and therefore need have no fear for my lodgings. Hence, the fifteen crowns will be ample."

Having thus disposed of twenty-five of his forty crowns, and thereby seen himself in imagination in a state of respectability, Louis walked his apartment with a feeling of high satisfaction.

Suddenly he paused, with an uneasy brow.

"But stay," he mentally exclaimed; "it will never do to make one's appearance at the palace twice the same day in the same dress! Here's a pretty position for the remainder of my forty crowns! See, now, what it is to be a gentleman, without a gentleman's purse! What is to be done?"

And in his perplexity, the Norman ran his fingers through his fine dark-brown hair, which—we must confess it—became literally moist at this aspect of affairs.

"It is plain the forty crowns will not purchase two prince-suits, while they might two ordinary lords," he observed, presently; "they would pay for one of each; but how would it look to appear in the morning as a prince, and in the afternoon only as a lord?"

No, that will never do. Nor would the matter be improved by going first as a lord, and afterward a prince, as the shallowness of one's purse would be visible in either case. No, it must be either as the lord or the prince, throughout; and as the lord would not be likely to command the respect of the ushers, it must be with head up and a bold front—that is to say, as the prince on both occasions!"

Bravely argued, Norman, like a gentleman of high instinct! But who, alas, has only forty crowns, while to be the prince costs fifty.

"What is to be done?" pursued the young man, which, as will be noticed, was the second time during his ruminations he had asked this important question. "Let us see!"

"Let us see!" he repeated, pacing the chamber, with excited steps, "forty crowns are not fifty; that is plain enough. If it costs twenty-five crowns for one suit fit for a prince, it will take fifty for two—that is plain enough, also; whereas I have only forty, and there is no system of mathematics by which, to a tailor's eyes, forty can be made to appear fifty. What is to be done? Let us see—let us see!"

By which, it will be seen, the Norman was waxing warm. But then does not everybody know that it is in seasons of heat that all great ideas are begotten?

As we have said, in the beginning of this true history, nature had been kinder to our hero than fortune; and, therefore, as nature is constant, she stood by her favorite now.

"I cannot make the fifteen crowns buy a second suit fit for a prince," he only remarked, in a few moments with a triumphant light illumining his features; "but what is to prevent me from laying them out in a splendid uniform which shall eclipse that of the King's Guards, which can easily be obtained, musketeer and all, for that sum, and which, if selected with taste, and have a fine effect, may strike the eye of the Queen's Treasurer, and be by her adopted as the permanent uniform of the Musketeers? See what it is," he added, with excusable vanity, under the exhilarating thought; "to have a Norman head on one's shoulders, which, as every Norman is ready to testify, is the only real head in all the world!"

Suddenly, however, the heated brain beneath that luxuriant hair brought forth another idea, which may be said to be equivalent to a discovery.

"But, if I pay five-and-twenty crowns for a suit fit for a prince, as good policy would seem to dictate, and fifteen for a uniform worthy to be adopted for the Musketeers, I shall not have a sou left, and then what becomes of my breakfast this morning, my dinner at noon, and my supper in the evening? Here's a position for a Norman, a prince, a musketeer."

Certainly, it was a poser; for hunger is not the pleasantest companion, and even a Norman must eat, whatever the character of his head.

"Let us see," he continued; and, as has already appeared, every time he said "Let us see," he presently saw. "How would it sound to hear that the son of the Count of Ferat, the individual who flourished at court like a lord, the Musketeer in the grand uniform, had not in the pocket of his splendid doublet the first sou with which to purchase a dinner?"

Of course, ludicrously.

"Then, too, what if after the disbursement for it of the fifteen crowns, the uniform should not be adopted, but another, and a costlier one in its stead, and I not only without a crown to pay for the latter, but the first sou to keep my stomach silent until Mademoiselle Adrienne de Bowmanville sees fit to advance the first month's pay. What then?"

Certainly, this was to be considered.

"Then, if Mademoiselle Adrienne should conclude not to make any advance, but, on the contrary, not to pay at all till the month has expired, how would that operate? And could a man, even a Norman, hold his flesh for a month, so as to appear respectable, on an empty stomach? Doubtful!"

We should think so.

"But," continued the young Norman, "the suit fit for a prince, and the uniform worthy of a musketeer must be had. There is no shrinking from that fact; for the son of the Count of Ferat must not go to court like a beggar, the Queen must be proud of her moral

support, and—and—the young lady in the mask, who has haunted me all night, may be looked on!"

Ha! ha! Norman, the secret of thy desire to shine is coming out at last, and betraying thee!

"And, therefore," continued the young man, bringing his cogitations to a close, "hunger or no hunger, we will have the prince-suit, and the Musketeer-uniform, adoption or no adoption."

And with this gallant resolve, which indeed only a brave man could make, the Norman, ignoring his breakfast, went out to pay his respects to a tailor.

CHAPTER VI.

Precisely at ten o'clock, our hero, who had found a tailor to his mind, entered the palace, in all the glory of fashion, and, giving his name to a lord in waiting, desired to see the King.

At the mention of his name, bawled out by the attendant, which, thanks to the ingenuity of the owner of the voice with whom he the night before had had the interview, was known to everybody, all eyes were turned upon him, to behold the redoubtable hero of the market-place.

Thanks to his tailor, or rather his five-and-twenty crowns, his tall, manly figure was set off to the finest advantage, and he could afford to endure the staring of the lords, few of whom could compare in form or costume with himself, and of the maids of honor, nearly all of whom regarded him with eyes eloquent with admiration.

"I do not see her here," he muttered, rapidly running his eye through the throng. "True, I do not know her face; but I feel that I should recognize her from a thousand; and were she present, my heart would leap with a wild bound, as it does not now."

"Room for M. de Lemmonnier!" cried an usher from the throne room.

The throng about the door fell back, and Louis, with a dignified but modest step, passed in.

The throne-room was a large and gorgeous oblong apartment, with, near the further end, before a tall, broad, purple screen, two royal chairs on a raised dais, overhung with a canopy of gorgeous crimson ornamented with golden lilies; fauteuils and luxuriant chairs along the sides; a richly frescoed ceiling, from which in the centre hung down a brilliant chandelier; and a mosaic floor.

It was comparatively filled with lords and ladies in waiting, who, some standing, and some sitting, broke off their low-toned converse as Louis entered, and turned their eyes upon him in mingled curiosity and surprise.

An oval table, to the left of the throne, sat at ease, facing each other, and smiling, perhaps, over some rollicking adventure, two gentlemen, in the prime of young manhood, one of whom, more plainly dressed than the other, wore, running from his right shoulder to his left hip, a pale blue scarf, sumptuous and dazzling with colors. This was Francis the First.

As Louis approached, following the chamberlain, the King's companion rose from the table and retired to a window on the left, where sat a young lady without company, with whom he entered into conversation.

"I have the honor," said the High Chamberlain, a nobleman of a venerable but courtly presence, "to present to your Majesty M. Louis de Lemmonnier, son of the distinguished Count of Ferat, ex-Lieutenant under the Chevalier Devaux, of your Majesty's First Regiment of Horse."

Louis, bowing, bent his knee to the floor, in token of allegiance.

"Rise, M. de Lemmonnier, and welcome to our court," said the King, lifting him up, with a bluff but frank smile. "We had already heard of you, Sir, through your valiant feat in our market-place, where, as we learn, you in ten minutes laid open more heads with your Toledo than most men do in a campaign."

"Pardon, your Majesty; it was in defence of a woman."

"No excuses. The varlets deserved it; and you had served them right had you made dead men of them all, which, as I am a soldier, I wish you had. How fares the brave Count of Ferat?"

"Well, Sire; and he sends, through me, peace, health, and all good fortune to your Majesty."

"We thank him, and shall endeavor to deserve and reciprocate his love. The Count was a true Frenchman, M. de Lemmonnier. He performed prodigies for his King, and when the wars were over, returned modestly to his estates, without stopping to annoy us—we were young, then, and horribly in debt!—with a clamorous demand for pay!"

"He was a Norman, Sire," said Louis, proudly; "and fought for his King, not his King's gold!"

"Right, Sir; and we appreciated and were thankful for it. Had others done likewise, we had not had to struggle through an early reign with the depressing influences of an exhausted treasury. Times have changed since, however. We are now prosperous, and are ready to testify our gratitude to the noble Count, by forwarding to our utmost ability the interests of his son."

"Your Majesty is very kind."

"Kind, no; but grateful, and—just. What can we do for you, M. de Lemmonnier? Don't hesitate, man. Speak out, as you did the day before yesterday in the market-place!"

"I thank your Majesty, and shall not fail, Sire, to report your kind offer to the Count of Ferat, who will be deeply penetrated by it, and consider it a new tie binding him still closer to your throne. But, indeed, Sire, this call was only to pay my respects to your Majesty, and to ask only your good wishes."

"What is that in? Tut, tut, a lieutenantancy in our Guards. Take it!"

"Pardon, Sire. I am already engaged."

"Impossible, Sir."

"Why, Sire?"

"Because you are a nobleman, and have no right to engage yourself elsewhere till you had offered your services to your King. Come Sir, it is not yet too late; take the lieutenantancy and trust to me for your fortune."

"Pardon, Sire; I can not," answered Louis, modestly, but with firmness.

"Be not too precipitate," said the King.

"Reflect; who serves Francis finds a not severe and generous master."

The Norman was silent, immovable.

"We have been besieged by applications for the lieutenantancy, which has been vacant a month or more," continued the King, hoping by flattery to overcome him, "but we are particular about the mettle in our Guards, and have preferred to keep it open. On hearing of the brave action of the stranger in a rustic suit of brown in the market-place, we said to ourself, 'We have at last found our lieutenant,' and immediately dispatched confidential agents in all directions to find and bring him before us. Come Sir," patting the young man playfully on the shoulder, "we must not have our trouble for naught. Our Lieutenant's room in the palace awaits its occupant; our Treasurer, an order to pay a thousand crowns, to do with as you please; and our Guards, their officer."

Louis did not answer for a few moments. Yet, though he was silent, the King could see by the working of his features, that he was powerfully shaken.

In fact, the poor Norman was bewildered. A lieutenantancy in the first company in the kingdom, which was exclusively composed of the best blood in France; the high and distinguished honor of a room in the palace; and a thousand crowns, a sum that would have bought up nearly the half of his native town of Ferat, were, in fact, enough to dazzle a much older man.

Then, too, his position as a Musketeer was precarious; it might prove a reality, and might not; it might last a month, or be brought to a close in a day; and he might have to go hungry for days unless the Queen's Treasurer considerably advanced him the whole or part of a month's pay.

But he felt that he had entered into this position of his own free-will, for the sake of an unhappy lady, who stood in need of help, and had perhaps built great hopes upon his faith; and he bravely resolved, come what might, to stand by it, like a true Norman gentleman.

"Your answer," said Francis.

"I am engaged, Sir, and cannot break my word," said Louis.

"Tut tut!" exclaimed Francis. "We will make your peace with the party, whosoever he shall be, so you shall come off with honor." Turning to the table, pulling forward a paper and snatching up a pen, "Let me sign your commission."

"No, Sire."

Francis looked at him in astonishment.

"Do you remember that we are the King of France, and have an exclusive right to the services of our nobility?" he said, to overawe him.

"I am aware that that is claimed by our monarchs, Sire."

"Do you dispute the claim?" demanded Francis, quickly.

"No, Sire."

"Your meaning, then? Quickly, Sir!" said Francis, to confuse him.

"This, Sire; I have entered into an engagement with another, who, doubtless, places some store upon my good faith, and I have no option before me as a gentleman, but honorably to keep my word!"

"Does your employer pay like me?"

"No, Sire."

"Does he offer you the half, the quarter, the eighth of what I do?"

"No, Sire."

"And yet you prefer that other to me?" said the King, severely.

"Sire, it is not a question of pay, but of honor?"

"Very well, Sir," said Francis, coldly. "Who is this person that in the opinion of the son of the Count of Ferat takes precedence of his King?"

"Sire," said Louis, in reproach.

"To whom are you engaged?" demanded Francis, with impetuosity.

"I do not know, Sire."

"Sir!" said Francis, his countenance darkening.

"It is as I have the honor to inform your Majesty," said Louis, remembering his promise to himself in the morning, to act with intelligence and courage.

Francis surveyed him in angry astonishment.

"What, you are enraged, and do not know to whom?"

"Even so, Sire."

Francis observed him for a few moments, as if to read him to the soul, when only exclaiming: "He is too brave to die: there is some mystery here," he said, aloud.

"What is the nature of your service? You can tell that!"

"Yes, Sire. I am in the Queen's Musketeers."

"The what, Sir!" said Francis, as if mistrusting his ears.

"The Queen's Musketeers, Sire."

The countenance of the King resembled that of a man who doubts whether he is in his senses.

"Either this young man is a simpleton, or some intrigue is afoot!" he mentally exclaimed. "Do you know that there is no such corps," he added, aloud.

"No, Sire, I do not know that," returned Louis, firmly. "On the contrary, I feel that there must be such a corps, since, as I have had the honor to tell your Majesty, I am one of its members."

"This cannot be a conspiracy, or the fellow would not have favored me with a call," muttered the King, "some plot of woman's hatching lies beneath it." Then addressing the Norman, he demanded:

"When was this corps organized?"

"I do not know, Sire."

"Who is its Commander?"

"I cannot tell, Sire."

"What position do you yourself hold in it?"—private, lieutenant or what?"

"Nor that either, Sire," replied Louis, who as the reader is already aware, only told the truth.

"But you can surmise?"

"I cannot, Sire."

"Tut tut, Sir; bethink you," said Francis, impatiently. "Your King is not to be answered thus!"

"Sir, I am a Norman gentleman, and never equivocate nor trifle with the truth. Were your Majesty to question me from the rack, I could answer only as I have."

"With whom did you enter into the engagement?" demanded Francis, equally indignant and perplexed.

"That, Sire, as you are a gentleman, you must excuse me from answering!" said Louis, respectfully, but with courage.

"Was it in a house or in a street?"

"I cannot tell your Majesty."

"Sir," said Francis, foaming. "Reflect you are talking to your King."

"Sire," said Louis, with a tremendous mental struggle to retain his self-possession,

which was on the point of eluding his control, "I cannot answer otherwise than as I have."

"Did your employer put you under silence in this?" demanded Francis, quickly.

"No, Sire. But it may have been an inadvertent omission; or the party may have supposed that it was so understood, and I therefore am not at liberty—"

"But you are at liberty; at least we shall make you so!" interrupted the King, furiously stamping his foot. "What, ho, there! my Guards. Quick!"

The next moment the Captain of the King's Guards entered the apartment at a quick step, at the head of twenty men.

"Now Sir, quick, before I order your arrest," said Francis, sternly, "The name of your employer!"

"I do not know it, Sire," said Louis, respectfully, but with rugged courage.

"Is it a man or a woman?"

"I cannot answer, Sire."

"Were you engaged in a house or in the street?"

"I have already answered, Sire!"

"Seize and away with him!" furiously cried the King. "Yet stay. One question first, and choose between an explicit reply and a dungeon. By whom were you approached in this?"

"Sire," answered Louis, with modest firmness, "I was approached in honor, engaged in honor, and so help me Heaven, in my extremest need! by that honor I shall stand!"

"For the last time! was it a man or a woman?"

"Sir," said Louis, walking up to the Captain of the Guard, and tendering him his sword, "I am your prisoner!"

Francis, his features inflamed with rage, stamped his foot, and uttered that oath which is said to have fallen from his lips only seven times, of which this was the third.

"Eternal blackness! are we the King of France, and lives there within our realm a man who dares refuse to answer when we question him?" to the Captain of the Guards, with a sudden revulsion of feeling. "Touch him at your peril, Sir. He is a brave, high-souled gentleman, and worth in sterling manhood a thousand such as you. Upon your eel, Sir—begone, Sir," he continued, as the Guards retired in confusion; "is it well thus to try your King!"

"Oh, Sire," returned Louis, with feeling, "it is your Majesty who is trying me—not I, your Majesty. It is not my freedom that is in peril here, but the only treasure over which I am guardian—my honor, which is with me higher than freedom, higher than life, yea, even than your Majesty! I am only a poor Norman gentleman, Sire; but where my word is given, there I am, I must be, faithful!"

"'Tis well," said Francis, calming down. "We will not urge this from thee at present!"

"Nor at any future time, I trust, Sire."

"Umph! We shall see. Call again, and often. And when your engagement is up, I want to talk with you."

"Thanks, Sire. But, if I mistake not, your Majesty will see me again this day."

"What! You have concluded to see your employer, and, if possible, to get off? So much the better."

"No Sire, not that," said Louis, smiling. "But your Majesty may look for me again, two hours after noon."

"'Tis well," said Francis, giving him his hand to kiss. "We do not understand you, but we shall rejoice to see you." And as the young man bowed himself from the presence, he added, inly: "He shall yet be my Lieutenant. He is like sterling gold. I must have him, at any price!"

As the young Norman retired, a young lady of medium height, a slender but exquisitely-chiseled figure, a fair and dazzling complexion; with dark eyes, in whose limpid depths might be distinctly discovered a high and noble soul, a fine Grecian head such as Raphael loved to give his Madonnas; and clad in a plain purple velvet basque, fastened up to the throat with a row of nine oval buttons of plain gold, and a flowing skirt of blue watered silk, rose from the side of a female companion, near a window, and modestly and noiselessly withdrew.

She was known as Mademoiselle Adrienne de Bowmanville, the favorite and confidante of the Queen.

CHAPTER VII.

"Going out again, Normandy?" asked tall Jacques Fromage, as Louis was attiring himself for his afternoon-visit to the palace.

"As you see," smiled Louis.

"What luck this morning with the King?"

"We struck no bargain," answered Louis, who did not yet know the son of the wax-maker well enough to trust him with his affairs.

"Any hopes?"

"Who can tell? Life is a lottery, and no man can say his fortune is made till he has it in his hand."

"Did his Majesty speak you fair?"

"He thought he might yet have a vacancy for me. In fact, he has one now; but I do not wish to take it. Any news?"

"Yes. A gipsy was here about an hour ago, to see you; but, not finding you in, he went away, promising to call again. I tried to get him to leave his business, but it was of no use. I guess something is in the wind, for he looked as if his blood was up."

"Perhaps the palmist is ill?" suggested Louis.

"No, he didn't look that way."

"Did he mention her name?"

"No further than that he had a message from her to you. Hark!"

There was a low knock at the door.

"Come in," said Louis.

The door opened; and a man of about forty, with a fine Italian head, a bushy black beard, a swart complexion, and dressed in a red woolen cap whose top hung down about his ear, a picturesque blue shirt, a loose neckcloth, short trunks; a broad belt, in which was a long wooden-handled knife; red tight-fitting pantaloons; buff boots, with broad open tops; and having altogether a careless slouching air, appeared upon the threshold. His eyes were bloodshot, and the muscles of his mouth and nostrils quivered with feeling.

As his glance fell on the Norman, his features lit up with an air of mingled kindness and satisfaction.

"Come in," repeated Louis, seeing that he hesitated.

"Your business?" he added, as the gipsy entered.

The latter half glanced in embarrassment at tall Jacques, who considerably took the hint, and retired.

"Are you a friend to Thisbe, the palmist?" the gipsy then said to the Norman.

"I am," returned Louis, attentively observing him, "Why do you ask?"

"Would you strike a second brave blow for her?"

"Twenty, if necessary. Why?"

"Listen. I am the chief of the gipsy band of which Thisbe is the flower. Three weeks since, there came to our quarters two men, calling themselves, the one, Jean, a carpenter, the other, Henri, a smith. The one was a little above the common height, had dark eyes and hair, a bluff frank smile, and a commanding way; the other of about the same height, with a thick shock of curled jet-black hair, an olive complexion, piercing gray eyes, small and thin but firm lips, and a pointed chin and beard."

"An exact description of those two I saw sitting at a table in the throne-room this morning!" inly observed the Norman.

"They professed to have come for the purpose of having their fortunes read by the palmist," pursued the gipsy; "but Thisbe, who can trace the lines of fate only when the spirit is upon her, was not in a state to gratify them, and they went away, promising to call again; but, ere they went, sharp eyes in the band had observed that, though pretending to be on a social equality, yet the demeanor of the smith involuntarily betrayed that he was conscious of a superior in his companion."

"They called two weeks later, a second time," went on the gipsy. "This time they were not so guarded. Thisbe was in the reading spirit also, and, on examining the hand of the carpenter, she turned pale."

"She saw he was not what he seemed."

"More than that; that he was a man of such high birth, that he had not his peer in France!"

Louis made no remark.

"The maiden will not lie; and as it was not prudent to tell him who he was, she declined to read him a fictitious tale, and, drop-

pling his hand, hastily withdrew. The pair retired, not understanding her conduct, but called again three evenings later, for, as they said, an explanation. But Thisbe had, in the meanwhile, communicated to me the revelation which she had read in the carpenter's hand, and, comprehending the real motive of their coming, I had given my instructions to the band, and we were prepared for them."

"You did not attack them?" said Louis.

"You shall hear," said the chief. "When they entered to see the palmist, they beheld, instead, two stalwart gipsies, and heard the door close fast upon them, when, perceiving that they were understood, and desecrating peril, they instinctively put their hands to their sides for their swords, which, however, being apparently only artisans, they had not with them. But if they had not swords they had knives, which they the next moment snatched from their bosoms, and then threw themselves upon their guard; and not an instant too soon, the two gipsies were upon them with clubs, which, in spite of their best defence, soon brought them to the floor, when, deprived of their weapons, they were pushed into the street, whence, the air reviving them, they speedily crawled away."

"Where?" cried Louis, in mingled amazement and uneasiness. "The secret of the King's real or pretended illness is out! Did you know who they were when you ordered your men to this?" he asked, aloud.

"I did!" answered the gipsy, with flashing eyes. "And I had done the same were they a thousand times what they were!"

Louis looked grave. To touch in anger a nobleman was no trifling matter, but for striking the King there was but one sentence—the stake!

"I am now coming to the main point," said the chief, his dark features kindling with excitement. "Last night, at twelve, when all was still, a file of soldiers, led by an officer, suddenly appeared in the gipsy quarter, where one of the band, unable to sleep, was sitting and cooling himself at the door. In an instant the soldiers, on coming up, felled him senseless, and gagged, bound, and threw him into the roadway, where he was discovered by his comrades at daybreak."

"I anticipated as much," said Louis. "But the soldiers did not content themselves with that?"

"No. For when, on hearing his story, the band was summoned to see who had been arrested, all answered to their names but one, and that one was—guess!"

"One of the stalwart wielders of the clubs?"

"Thisbe!"

The Norman, coloring, stared at the chief in surprise.

"And this," added the latter, "will not appear so amazing, when I tell you that in the voice of the officer, who, together with the soldiers, was in disguise, the gipsy had recognized—whom, think you?"

"The Superintendent of Police, perhaps?"

"The man with the gray eyes!"

Louis stared. "And that probably was what the pair at the table in the throne-room were laughing over when I entered," he exclaimed to himself: "I see it all. The truant King after the palmist, but failing and beaten; De Bounier, writhing under his own share of the clubs, makes use of his butler to foment a slander, for the purpose of raising all society against the innocent author, and crushing her, without being himself exposed; but, in turn defeated by a strange chance, and perceiving that he has been too precipitate, plays panderer to the King, to maintain his favor with whom he has, perhaps not for the first time, committed an act which should bring down upon him the vengeance of every honest man!" Then turning to the gipsy, who was regarding him with earnestness, he said, aloud: "What have you done in this?"

"Nothing. I have waited to see you."

"Me?" said Louis, surprised. "Why me?"

"We are a banned race," said the chief. "Gipsies have no friends at law. Justice is not for them; and if it were, what judge would stand up for us against the powerful Count de Bounier and the King! With you, the case is different. You are a French citizen; the law is open to you; you have but to demand the palmist, and the judge will see she is forthcoming."

"You are wrong," said Louis, seeing, in an instant, all the difficulties in the case. "No judge would hazard the anger of the King and the hatred of his all-powerful favorite, for me any sooner than for you."

"You leave the maiden to her fate, then?" said the gipsy, with cold surprise.

"No; she is a woman, and I am a Norman. But this is a wrong that must be righted by the only methods within our power—stratagem and courage. How many men have you at command, should occasion call for aid?"

"For every man in the King's Guards," said the gipsy, "I can count two."

"So many?" said Louis, surprised.

"All of whom," added the chief, "are from this moment yours, to order and as you will."

A startling thought flashed through the mind of the Norman, and burnt itself into his brain. What it was, will be seen hereafter.

"When and where can I see you again?" he asked.

"I will establish a chain of messengers between this and our quarters," said the gipsy chief; "the first of whom will have his post at the corner, up the street, where he or his relief will be found from dusk to dawn every night, till further orders. Say at any time to him you wish to see me, and in ten minutes thereafter I will stand before you."

"Enough," said Louis. "I have business now at the palace. To-night, I will see you again."

"At what hour?"

"Who can tell? You will hear from me through the messenger."

The gipsy chief bowed and went out.

"Oh, man! that leavest to loneliness and tears thine own wife, and goest out to prey upon the virtuous and the lowly, what would not be done to thee for this last act, wert thou not the King!" mused Louis. "And yet," he added, "he cannot be all base. His voice has a manly ring, his forehead an honest air, and his eye the light of a high and glorious soul. He is only thoughtlessly bad; and there must be some moments when his better nature pleads for his suffering, injured Queen, for his own true manhood, and for the innocent he betrays. His evil counselor once removed, his own good impulses would gradually bring him round to right, and all would then be well. Let me believe this; for did I not, this right arm should wither ere it ever lifted sword in his service!"

With these thoughts, the young man, in his new-bought uniform, quitted his lodgings, to try what fortune had in store for him at the palace.

On his way, he paused involuntarily before the window of a pie-baker, in which was temptingly displayed a large assortment of mutton and other pies, arranged in squares, in ovals, in circles, in pyramids, and from each pile of which ran up a small slender stick, supporting a round flat white card, on which was painted, "Fresh, and only one sou apiece."

Louis, who had had neither breakfast nor dinner, eyeing the pies with a hungry air, modestly slipped his hand into the pockets of his doublet, which he felt all around.

"Ah!" he presently observed, passing on with a grim smile; "but when one has not the sou!"

CHAPTER VIII.

As Louis approached the palace, his heart beat tremulously with hope that the fair unknown in the mask (he felt that she was fair) might be in the ante-room.

He knew that his uniform looked well, and he desired her to see him in it. Not that he had any little vanity. But he fancied that, if she saw him in that costume, she might be led to observe him with attention, and perchance with interest.

Had he been called upon to define his feelings for the mask, he might perhaps have been unable. But he felt that if she were only present, it would be very pleasant; that if she thought favorably of his uniform, her opinion would be more satisfactory to him than that of all the court—yea, of infinitely more importance even, than that of the Queen's Treasurer herself that no one's presence, favor, or commendation could give him so great internal pleasure as hers.

"Her voice," he murmured, "is like gushing music. I still hear its sweet echoes in my

heart, and could listen to it forever. Surely, no other woman ever born had a voice like hers. That of the unhappy lady was clear, and silvery, and plaintive, and penetrating. But, oh, the fair unknown's was like the voice of some pure, earnest, loving being, whom to know eclipses all the joys of earth. Then the touch of her soft hand! Can I ever forget the exquisite thrill it sent through my every nerve and fibre, in the park, and in the hall near the door? Earth was no longer earth, but Eden. But (smiling at himself) silence, dreamer! Why indulge in thoughts like these—thou who art unable to afford thyself even so insignificant a necessity as a dinner. And thou art going to mingle with great lords and ladies, too; and to hold up thy head and put on stately airs, as if thou wert opulent as any Croesus. If the fair unknown but knew thee, and could have seen thee eyeing wistfully the pies in the baker's window! But here we are at the palace—let us put our best foot foremost."

Passing up the main staircase to an open hall on the second floor, thronged with the lower nobility, and civil and army officers, who regarded his uniform with attention, and wondered what it represented, he worked his way to the open door of the ante-room, which was filled with a brilliant assemblage of courtiers, ambassadors, ministers of state, and last, though not least, the officers of the Guards, awaiting the arrival of the King.

"Whom shall I have the honor to announce, Monsieur?" asked an usher at the door.

"Louis de Lemmonier, of the Queen's Musketeers!" answered, with the air of a Duke at least, the man without a sou in his pocket, and who had had neither breakfast nor dinner.

At this announcement of a title of which they had never before heard, all eyes were instantly leveled at the new-comer, in mingled curiosity and surprise; some to see the hero of the market-place, but the greater number to observe the uniform of the new corps he represented.

"They do not know that the Queen's Treasurer has yet to decide upon it!" thought the Norman, passing, with a mental smile, to within a few feet of the door of the throne-room, where, taking his position, he instantly became the object of all eyes, but particularly of the Guards, who, whispering among themselves, regarded him with frowning attention, as though they viewed his presence in the palace in the light of an impertinence.

"I don't see any of the other Musketeers," mentally muttered the Norman, "who, it appears to me, ought to be here by this time; it devolves upon me to stand up for the corps, in all its dignity and importance. Therefore, a bold front, Sir, and do not let the puppies of the King's Guards, who are now twirling their mustaches at thee with envy and ill-concealed spleen, imagine they can ever hope to overawe for an instant a Queen's Musketeer! Stand up for your lady, Sir!"

All eyes were now turned upon the model contest between the solitary Musketeer and the officers of the Guards; for everybody intuitively comprehended that they were thenceforth rivals and enemies.

But the former, bearing himself with mingled modesty and firmness, was not to be eyed down. On the contrary, drawing himself up to his fullest height, he calmly folded his arms, and returned the insolent gaze of the Guards with an air of tranquil but sturdy defiance.

Perhaps the recollection of his great feat in the market-place, perhaps the restrained lightning in his fearless eye, perhaps his brave but unpretending air; or, it may be, all these combined, had influence with the Guards: for first, one turned aside his eyes; then another, and ere long, the Captain, who on feeling himself unable longer to keep up the combat, adroitly affected to have had his attention withdrawn to another object, nearer to the throne-room.

The spectators, who were too well bred to permit their satisfaction to appear, glanced with applauding eyes at the conqueror, who, however, equally well bred, appeared to be utterly unconscious of his victory.

Suddenly there was a fluttering movement in the assemblage, which instantly divided off, leaving a long cleared lane, two or three yards wide, along which the King, accompanied by his favorite, the Count de Bounier, and a page, was seen advancing on his way to the throne-room.

All hats were instantly uncovered, and every head bowed low in homage.

As he passed into the throne-room, the throng turned to follow, or rather to be successively introduced, when the Norman, who had been inwardly fretting and fuming at the tardiness of the other Musketeers, and keeping a sharp lookout for his royal mistress, and also (we must tell it) for the fair unknown, hastily touched the arm of the High Chamberlain, and pointed to the extremity of the ante-chamber, where a door to the private apartments of the palace had just been thrown open, and the Queen appeared, with her right hand in that of her favorite, and followed by five maids of honor.

"Thanks, Sir," said the Chamberlain, gratefully: "I had had no notice of her Majesty's intention to appear in state to-day. You have preserved me from the humiliation of an inadvertence." Then turning to the assemblage, he cried, in a loud voice: "Room, there, for her Majesty—room!"

There was a general murmur of surprise, a quick rustling of silks and feathers, a dividing of the crowd as before, and the next instant the Queen, her hand still in that of her favorite, and followed by her suite, moved (if we may coin a phrase), with modest majesty, along the lane.

Her cheek was by turns pale and blushing, as if conscious she was taking an unusual but all-important step, which yet was full of peril.

"Poor lady!" muttered Louis, "would I could aid thee!"

From the Queen, the Norman's eye wandered to her companion, when, in an instant, his heart leaped in his breast with a strange feeling.

The latter was Mademoiselle Adrienne de Bowmanville, whose portrait we have already twice looked upon; that is to say, once at the window of the linen-draper's in the marketplace, and the second time in the throne-room, after the Norman's first interview with the King.

"Heavens!" mentally exclaimed the young man, "if she be wedded or engaged, life has henceforth no charm, and I may bid adieu to hope, ambition, love, and lay me down and die."

The courtiers, the ambassadors, the officers of state, the King's guard, taken by surprise at this her first appearance in state in many months, and remembering the unimportance sought to be attached to her by the King, were embarrassed as to what should be their deportment on the occasion; and, therefore, with few exceptions, the ladies brazenly refrained from courtesying, and the gentlemen (!) from bowing as she passed; both supposing that such treatment toward his unloved consort would be most pleasing to the King.

"O lords and ladies!" mentally exclaimed the indignant Norman; "how little are you, lords; how little, ladies! But where are the Musketeers, who ought to be on hand to escort with honor, their mistress, and by their presence to give her courage! Peste! if this be an instance of their punctuality, I shall wish me quit of their comradeship. But, since I alone am here to represent the corps, I must bear myself with the greater carefulness. Therefore, a brave front, Musketeer, and let the puppies of the King's Guards see that if her Majesty has but one man in all her company to back her, that one is a whole company in himself!"

In accordance with this brave thought, Louis, as the Queen approached, bowed almost to a level with the floor, and remained so till, with her escort, she had fairly passed, when he sprang to his feet, and followed on behind, to bring up the rear, which he did with military step, and a proud, grand air, as if his royal mistress, the poor trembling Queen, was the bravest, most important, and most popular personage in all the nation, and as if her guard of honor, the Musketeers, numbered countless thousands, and her passage through the ante-chamber to the court-room was a great triumphal march after some great battle which she had gallantly fought and won!

CHAPTER IX.

The effect upon the assemblage of the Norman's chivalric impulse was electric.

Lords, ladies, ambassadors, ministers of state, even the Guards, were struck with admiration.

They felt that it was a brave and highly manly thing thus publicly to stand up for a

poor, friendless woman, who, for no fault of her own, had been, as it were, ostracised in her own household. And, though few were so courageous as openly to express their feelings yet there, fewer still that did not feel, among the fair that they could love, and among the gentlemen that they could fight for the gallant fellow, to the death.

And from admiration of her lone champion, there arose in their hearts a sentiment of pity for the poor Queen herself, for whom they hoped for better times than had been had for many a long day. And they felt that, though policy might dictate their outward deportment should be accordant with the apparent wishes of the King, yet, that in their inner being they should go with their best feelings for his consort.

It is true this was after all only a species of illegitimate sympathy. Still, it was something, and all history attests that the smallest seed of good once planted in the heart, though it may lie dormant for a time, yet, sooner or later, takes root, springs up, and expands, till, from a tender plant, it becomes a tall and stately tree. The Queen was not destined to finish her passage alone.

On hearing the announcement of the Chamberlain, the King, who, with his favorite, had just reached the royal writing-table, paused, as he was about taking a seat, and said to his companion, with a slight frown:

"What, now? I fancied I had taught the daughter of Louis the Twelfth that Francis the First was not of the henpecks, and would have no woman dawdling after him! What does she here?"

"Perhaps to bring your Majesty back to apron-strings!" replied De Bounier, with a satiric light in his gray eyes. "Wives have a propensity that way."

"Blight upon her!" exclaimed the monarch. "If she gets in the habit of coming here again, I—"

"Lo, where stands her Majesty!" interrupted the favorite, with a side-glance at the door, where the Queen, overcome by her feelings, had paused an instant, with modest, downcast eyes, hoping that her husband might come to her aid, and, for appearances at least, escort her to a seat.

"Let her stand, come in, or go back, I care not," said Francis, turning his eyes in another direction; "it will teach her not to intrude here again, till she is sent for."

"That would not be intruding!" laughed his evil genius. "A bull, Sire—on my life, a bull!"

"Tut, tut," said the monarch, "what are bulls but double thoughts hastily compressed into one? Go and give your hand to her Majesty."

"I am saved the trouble, Sire," said De Bounier. "Look!"

Francis turned, and beheld a sight that for an instant caused his cheek to redden with a reproachful blush.

The poor Queen, pale as death, walking with difficulty, and evidently upheld only by a noble pride, was passing to a divan near the throne, leaning on the arm of a Musketeer, who was whispering, in a low voice, intended only for her ear, but which, owing to the general stillness, the clear tones of the Musketeer himself, and the favorableness of the apartment for conveying sound, was yet audible to the King.

"Courage, your Majesty, courage!"

In fact, upon the stopping of the Queen at the door, the gallant Norman, suspecting the real cause, and perceiving at a glance that the monarch had no intention of coming to her assistance, had, quick as thought, stepped forward, and said, in a low tone:

"Deign, Madame, to take the arm of a gentleman who is devoted to your Majesty."

And it was time. For the unhappy lady, suffering from a cold, convulsive shiver, was nearly sinking.

She gratefully placed her arm in his, and murmuring: "Hold me up, and walk gently, Monsieur, for I fear I am about to die!" slowly moved on, her favorite attendant following close behind, to watch her if she fell.

"The Norman again!" exclaimed Francis, in surprise.

"Look out that he does not run away with her Majesty!" laughed De Bounier, with envy.

"Would he but do that service, I'd thank him, Count!" said the monarch, sitting down, and without paying further attention to the Queen, making a sign with his hand to

the Chamberlain to introduce the parties in the ante-room.

After leading his royal mistress to the divan, Louis resigned her to her maids, and retired a short distance to the right, toward an oriel window, when, folding his arms, he took up his position, and looked around, to see if any had the temerity to mock or otherwise exhibit toward her the first faint vestige of disrespect.

Fortunately, no such spirit was evinced, and he next threw a glance around the apartment, till it at length fell upon the Count de Bounier, who, standing behind the King's chair, had for some time been stealthily measuring him, internally as well as exteriorly, as if he comprehended by intuition that he should one day have to grapple with that organism in a combat which had few parallels.

The eyes of both met in full gaze; and it was plain from the mettle of the men respectively, that neither would draw off while a particle of nervous force remained.

The King's favorite, too proud to retract, and yet blushing in spite of himself at his detection, attempted to carry the day, first by an indignant frown; then, as that had no effect, by a defiant stare; finally, perceiving that that, also, was useless, with a long, steady, malignant gaze: in the midst of which, greatly to his mortification, he was unexpectedly interrupted by the King calling upon him in reference to an affair of state, leaving the Musketeer still surveying him with the same calm, firm, imperturbable eye he had employed throughout.

The incident was slight, but far from unimportant; for, having been observed by nearly all the court, it had the effect, with the previous incidents of the day, of establishing the fact that the poor Queen had, in her single Musketeer, a champion able to maintain her cause against all the forces, moral and physical, that could be arrayed against her by the King.

Mademoiselle Adrienne de Bowmanville, who had one of those minds that read and understand at a glance, and see into everything without appearing especially to notice anything, had been a quiet spectator of the moral struggle, and at its conclusion turned to relate it to her royal mistress, to whom it gave courage for the long conflict which she saw yet in the future between herself and the King.

"Call him," whispered her Majesty to her favorite. "We must thank him."

"Had we better, your Majesty?" said Mademoiselle de Bowmanville. "Is it a good policy. Will it not make him vain?"

"It will show to all the court that we rely upon and appreciate him;" returned, with smiling significance, the Queen, who had just been informed that the King and the Count with the gray eyes were whisperingly glancing toward the divan.

Adrienne, comprehending her, smiled, and made a sign to Louis to approach.

But the Queen did not yet understand the Count de Bounier, who, having perceived the sign, explained its probable meaning to the King, and suggested that an interruption of intercourse between her Majesty and the Musketeer, for the nonce, might possibly defeat the transparent intention of calling the latter forward.

Francis, who was in one of those ill-humors when even kings are capable of very small things, caught at the suggestion, and called a page.

"To whom am I to address myself Mademoiselle?" asked the Musketeer, on coming up.

"To her Majesty, Sir," replied the favorite.

A thrill of exquisite delight darted through every nerve of the Norman.

In the voice that had spoken, he had heard again that of the fair unknown!

Fortunately, as we have seen, he was a man of self-command; and the keenest eye would have failed to observe that he was conscious of the discovery.

"Sit down, Sir," said the Queen, motioning him playfully to a seat beside herself on the divan; "and tell us the thoughts of a gentleman from the fields of Normandy who has visited the court for the first time!"

"Your Majesty cannot be serious!" said Louis, recognizing, also, the voice of the unhappy lady. "The high honor of a seat beside the first lady of France—"

"His Majesty desires to see Monsieur de Lemmonier!" pertly interrupted a page, touching him on the arm.

The Queen bit her lip. She comprehended, with the intuition of persecuted minds, the object and the source of the interruption.

"My compliments to his Majesty," said Louis, observing the Queen's mortification, and determining at all hazards to avenge it; "and say to him, that while I am on duty, there is no such person as Monsieur de Lemmonier, whose identity is sunk in his official character of her Majesty's Musketeer!"

"Is it your wish, Sir, that I take this reply to his Majesty?" said the page, in astonishment.

"Have I not said so?" returned the Norman.

The page left him, but presently returned, saying, pertly:

"The compliments of his Majesty the King to her Majesty the Queen, and he desires to know whether she will kindly permit her Musketeer to spend a few moments with his Majesty!"

"My young friend," said Louis, to punish the puppy's impudence, in addressing the Queen, without first saluting her, "open your mouth!"

"Sir!" said the page, haughtily, "why should I open my mouth?"

"I simply wish to see where you have left your manners, and whether, during the delivery of that speech, you sputtered out any of your teeth!"

The maids of honor tittered, and the excited page, blushing scarlet, exclaimed, threateningly,

"In the meanwhile, Sir, you are keeping his Majesty waiting, and so I shall report."

"See there now, my tender lamb! It is you who are keeping his Majesty waiting."

"I, Sir!"

"You, my innocent! My royal mistress is the first lady in the kingdom—the Queen of France, Sir; a fact which her Majesty's self cannot forget, if you do. Therefore (you see the logic, don't you?) when her Majesty is addressed, it should be as to the highest lady in the nation; do you remember that, Sir? But you, Sir, owing, as I think, to a singular dullness of perception, a remarkable vacuity of mind, and an astonishingly bad breeding—spoke to her Majesty, just now, as if to some very ordinary lady; and therefore, Sir, therefore, as you perceive, her Majesty has not yet answered you. Try again Sir—try again, very respectfully; by taking off your hat to begin with, for instance; placing yourself before her Majesty very respectfully, for instance: and then, before speaking to her Majesty, making a very low bow, for instance. Now, Sir, come—begin!"

"Sir!" said the page, his eye flashing, and his veins swelling out from his skin like so many cords.

"You have not yet delivered your message to her Majesty, Sir!" said the Norman, imperturbably, but with severity, for his eye was beginning to kindle.

The page thought of the great feat in the market-place, the eye-whipping of the officers of the King's Guards, in the ante-room, and (for he had observed that, also) the still later moral conflict between De Bounier and the persistent Musketeer, and he deemed it prudent to capitulate, and to repeat his message, which he did, with all due respect, and precisely in the manner prescribed.

"Say to his Majesty," replied the Queen, "that I shall take great pleasure in acceding to his request."

"I will, your Majesty," replied the page. Then turning to the Norman, he continued: "Are you ready, Sir? His Majesty is waiting!"

"For what are you waiting?" said Louis, as though he had not heard him.

"For you, Sir."

"For me! Do you want me?"

"No, Sir. But the King does!"

"What has that to do with you? Your business is to deliver your message. Go, Sir, her Majesty wishes to give me my instructions. Come, retire!"

During this little scene, the silence of death reigned throughout the rest of the apartment, so that every eye had seen and every ear heard it, to its minutest detail.

"Decidedly, I must have that man!" muttered Francis. "He is worth his weight in gold! Well, Sir," to the page, "what said her Majesty?"

"That your Majesty's wish should be acceded to. But, if your Majesty pleases, I would rather not deliver any more messages to her Majesty in the presence of the Musketeer," said the page, presuming upon his position. "It is as much as any one's life is worth!"

"Ah, indeed!" said the King, who had a talent for dealing with all persons who presumed too much.

"As I have had the honor to tell your Majesty, the Musketeer is a terrible fellow; he will be browbeating your Majesty next!"

"Think you so?" said Francis, dryly.

"Well, Sir, it is very hard to ask you to perform duties not accordant with your feelings—very hard. And since I shall probably desire to communicate with our consort, and you had rather not be our messenger; and, moreover, since it is our wish not to have in our household any who may consider it hard to perform their duty in this respect, therefore, Sir, we release you from all further service, and shall instruct our Treasurer to pay you what may be due, and to cross your name from our books."

"Oh, but your Majesty!" cried the page, pale with alarm, "I did not mean that!"

"Ah, indeed!" said the King; "but we do. Therefore, Sir, we will talk no further upon the subject!"

The page bowed and retired, quivering with feeling, greatly to the astonishment of his fellows, who, having, in common with all the court, heard every word, looked at one another stupefied.

"Permit me, Sire, said De Bounier, who saw in this incident only another triumph of the Norman, who, as he foresaw, was destined eventually to become a formidable rival to himself, "to say a word to your Majesty in favor of the poor fellow, who—"

"Not a word," interrupted the King. "We know our own affairs best!"

The Count was dumb, but not in mind. He comprehended the subtlety of the King, who, in the discharge, had only thrown out another flattering bait with which to catch the Norman.

"Your Majesty sent for me," said Louis himself, now coming up.

"We did," said Francis. Then, turning to De Bounier, he added, "Count, pardon us!" Then, to the Chamberlain, "Music!" he said, for the purpose of drowning from others' ears what was about to pass between the Norman and himself.

The court took the hint, and retired; as did also the Count, who immediately turned to another in conversation.

The Chamberlain gave the order to the royal musician, and, the next instant, the soft notes of a seraphim fell gently on the ear, and divided with the general hum the waves of the scented air.

"Have you yet learned your rank in the Musketeers?" began the King.

"No, Sire," replied Louis, who easily divined the monarch's motive in sending for him.

"No! Where, then, is your captain? where your lieutenant, your comrades?"

"I do not know, Sire."

"Sir!" said Francis, in reproof.

"Your Majesty did me the honor to ask where the officers and privates of Her Majesty's Musketeers are, and I answered I did not know," said Louis, imperturbably.

"Tut, tut," said the King, with impatience. "Speak rationally; we are not a boy. Who is your captain?"

"I do not know, Sire."

"Your lieutenant?"

"I am ignorant of that, also, your Majesty."

"From whence do you receive your pay?"

"I have received none, Sire," said Louis.

"From whom are you to receive it?"

"I cannot tell, your Majesty."

"Are you pledged not to reveal it?"

"No, Sire. But the party that engaged me may have thought it was so understood."

"I must have this lump of Norman gold?" mentally exclaimed the monarch. "What is the state of your pocket—you can tell us that?"

"Sire, it contains not so much as would buy a mutton-pie, marked 'fresh, only one sou'!"

Francis touched, on the side of the writing-table, a private drawer opening with a spring, from which he took out a well-filled purse.

"Here, Sir," he said, "take this from your King. It is our wish that every gentleman who has business at our palace should be in a position to gratify all his wants."

The Norman started back, a single step.

"Pardon, Sire, I must decline," he said, his cheek crimsoning with a blush. "Though poor, I am not a beggar, and accept no alms."

"A gift from his King may be received by any Frenchman without dishonor!"

"I am the son of a poor but high-minded Norman gentleman, who early inculcated into my young mind that it is better to be poor than to owe fortune to the bounty of another; as he alone enjoys who has personally earned by brave and honorable effort. I have done nothing for your Majesty to entitle me to reward, and I may not accept a gratuity!"

"May not, Sir. Why?"

"Gifts, Sire, fetter the recipient with a sense of obligation to the giver, and I have a Norman's love of freedom. Particularly could I accept of nothing from your Majesty, since I am in the employ of her Majesty, the Queen, from whom alone could I receive rewards, and then only for services rendered."

"Very well, Sir," said the King, dropping the purse back into the drawer, and regarding the young man with earnest surprise. "It is not for us to alter any course you have marked out for yourself. But is there nothing you will accept from us?"

"At present, only your good wishes, Sire, and your Majesty's permission to return to my royal mistress, who has, I believe, something important to say to her Musketeer."

"Go, Sir," said Francis, cordially extending his hand, and then politely bowed himself from the presence.

"Brave, chivalric, the soul of honor!" said the King, looking after him; "I must, I will have him!"

"Will his Majesty interrupt us again, think you, Sir Musketeer?" said the Queen to the Norman, when he returned.

"I think not, your Majesty," replied Louis.

"Indeed, I feel confident he will not."

"Sit down, Sir," said the Queen, motioning him to a seat on the divan. "No hesitation, no excuses; sit down." Then, as Louis complied, she said, "Now, Sir, tell us, how do you like the Musketeers?"

"I do not like them at all, your Majesty."

"Why not, M. De Lemmonier?"

"Does your Majesty wish me to speak out?"

"Most certainly."

"I like for comrades men who respect and love their duty and their corps, and who are to be found at their post when wanted; which, I am sorry to say, is not the case with your Majesty's Musketeers, who ought, if ever, to have been promptly on their ground this afternoon!"

"Were they not, M. De Lemmonier?" said the Queen, smiling. "Be careful; the Captain is in the room, and he may not like your unflattering estimate of his men!"

"The captain is in the room, your Majesty! Why then did he not show himself at the proper time, to do honor to his royal mistress, on her passage through the ante-chamber?"

"He did show himself, and with effect, too, as we have heard. Did he not, Mademoiselle de Bowmanville?"

"So I have been told, your Majesty," modestly replied the favorite, dropping her eyes before those of the Musketeer, who himself blushed.

"This is very singular," said the Norman. "I looked around very carefully, but I could discover no one I could suppose to be in the corps. Will your Majesty be good enough to give me the name of my captain?"

The Queen smiling, glanced at her favorite, who replied, with a charming pout:

"M. de Lemmonier forgets that he ought to ask no questions concerning her Majesty's Musketeers."

"What! not who my captain is, my lieutenant, my comrades?"

"No, Sir."

"If I do not know my officers, how shall I be able to salute them?"

"If M. Lemmonier does not know them, he will not need to salute them."

"True, Mademoiselle. But if any one asks who my captain is, or who my comrades are, I shall be under the mortifying necessity of replying 'I do not know,' which will have the effect of leading the questioner seriously to doubt my words."

"No one in Paris asks impertinent questions, Sir."

"Pardon, Mademoiselle, I have been asked such within the last half-hour?"

"By his Majesty, you mean. And what did his Majesty ask?"

"The names of my captain, my lieutenant, my comrades."

"And you replied—"

"That I did not know."

"You can make the same answer to all others."

"True, Mademoiselle. But, his Majesty stared at the reply, as certainly would all others."

"Perhaps, so, M. de Lemmonier. But you have one satisfaction."

"What is that?"

"That after one such reply the party receiving it will never repeat the question."

"It may be," said Louis, with an air of perplexity. "But—"

"But, what, M. de Lemmonier?"

"They will not believe me."

"They will be too polite to tell you that."

"Possibly, Mademoiselle. But then one does not love to have his word doubted. It is equivalent to doubting his honor?"

"You have come to Paris well recommended, M. de Lemmonier," said the young lady, with a smile that made the Norman's heart beat like that of a fluttering bird; "and be assured no one will doubt your word!"

"I, Mademoiselle!" said the young man, "I brought only two letters of introduction, and no recommendation at all!"

"You recommended yourself, Sir, by your feat in the market-place!"

The Musketeer blushed. He now comprehended the young lady's meaning.

"In Paris, Sir," pursued the favorite, with another smile, that all but filled the Norman with delirium, "men are too polite to doubt the word of gentlemen who come well recommended, and therefore, when in regard to your captain or comrades, you say 'you do not know,' you will be unhesitatingly believed."

"You flatter, Mademoiselle!"

"No," replied the favorite, turning to the Queen.

"What is the opinion of your Majesty?"

"We think," said the latter, playfully, patting the Norman on the shoulder, "no one will doubt the word of our Musketeer!"

"Do you see, Sir," interposed De Bounier, who, sitting behind the royal writing-table, had, with the King, been an attentive observer of this scene.

"That her Majesty appreciates the Norman's value? Yes."

"Nothing more, Sir," continued the Count, hoping to inspire him with jealousy.

"That her Majesty looks to make capital for herself by lending importance to him, certainly."

"Nothing more, Sir," repeated the Count with a satiric smile.

"Nothing, Count," returned Francis, "I understand your meaning, but you are out, Sir. Her Majesty is as pure in mind as holiest devotee at matins; the Norman, one of those rare knightly hearts with whom honor is a substance, not a shadow, and whose proudest aim is to think no evil and do no wrong."

"We'll see," meanly shrugged de Bounier fairly green with envy.

"Tut, tut, Count," laughed Francis. "Let not your bile run away with your judgment. The Norman has an honest soul—an attribute, De Bounier," patting him on the arm with a playful, but significant smile, "that cannot be claimed by every man at our court of France!"

The baffled Count took the hint, and reddened, but did not venture a reply. He saw that the monarch was in what he termed one of his humors, and that to preserve his own influence, his most prudent course for the present was silence.

A movement now took place. The Queen, had borne herself bravely thus far, rose to retire, but with visible agitation.

"My Musketeer," she said, with a forced smile, "will you give me your hand to the door of my apartments?"

"Such an honor, your Majesty," said the Norman, "is not for an obscure personage like me. My royal mistress ought to be led by the first gentleman in France; and"—his eyes suddenly kindling with satisfaction, "lo here comes his Majesty!"

The Queen turned pale, and nearly fainted.

"An important moment, your Majesty!" hurriedly whispered Adrienne, pressing her hand, "Courage!"

It was a generous impulse of the King. A flow of good emotions, for which students in moral physiology could easily account, had been started by his admiration of the brave, high-minded Norman, and he mentally resolved for an instant to be magnanimous.

"Is it your Majesty's pleasure to retire?" he said, hastily advancing.

"It is, Sir," said the poor Queen, who could scarcely command herself.

"Take my hand, then," said the King, with affected cordiality.

The Queen did so, but hers was cold as marble. Her limbs, too, were rigid, and every step was with an effort.

Adrienne followed close behind, to support her if she gave way; the maids of honor after the favorite, and the Musketeer, with a proud, brave air, last of all.

The court looked on in astonishment.

"Your Majesty is not well," said the King, as they drew near to the door to the Queen's apartment.

"Oh, Sir—Francis—my loved lord!" stammered the Queen, whose emotions at this first respectful and apparently kind work in long months, were on the point of overflowing.

"We are in public, Madame; no scene," coldly interrupted the King, raising her hand to his lips, for they were now at the door.

As the monarch stepped aside, Adrienne, perceiving that her mistress could hardly proceed, hastily but gracefully advanced, and taking her arm in her own, whispered:

"Lean on me, your Majesty. Courage for yet a few moments."

"Well, Musketeer," said Francis, as the ladies disappeared, "did we please you in this?"

"You have done better, Sir," returned the Norman. "You pleased yourself, and acted a gentleman's part toward her Majesty."

"You are complimentary, Sir," said the monarch, not displeased with the answer. "Shall we see you this evening?"

"I do not know, Sir. I have not yet received my instructions."

"From whom are you to receive them?"

"I cannot tell, your Majesty."

"Still close as ever."

"I must be true to my position, Sir."

"Right, Sir," said the King. "Were all men that, how happy were kings! Welcome to our court, where we shall be always glad to see you."

With these words the monarch gave him his hand, and then, accompanied by several courtiers who followed to escort him, returned to the throne-room.

"For one who has had no breakfast nor dinner, muttered the Norman, "I may be said to-day to have done pretty well. But, after all," he added, with a grim smile, "what is its sum? High friends at court; but here it is nearly supper-time, and not a sou in my pocket. Is that doing very well. I am, too, left here kicking up my heels for instructions that may not come, and chewing the cud of mortification at not knowing who my captain is, my lieutenant, or my comrades, who perhaps, for all his Majesty can tell to the contrary, are secretly in the King's own Guards, or it may be among his courtiers, in which case, what became of the fifteen crowns I paid for my uniform! Ah! well," he continued, drawing a long breath, and striving to appear cheerful, "I will not do to give way, I can easily put up with hunger for a few days, when, if her Majesty's Treasurer should not volunteer to give me a small advance on my pay, I can pawn or sell my prince-suit, and stick to my uniform, if there comes no order to the contrary, without anybody being the wiser. Therefore, courage, heart—courage! Three days will tell the story. In the meanwhile, we will not think of food, but of Adrienne's voice, Adrienne's face, and the mine of worth and sweetness and rich love that lie in her pure soul!"

"Sir Musketeer," interrupted a page, at his elbow.

"Well, Sir," said Louis, pausing in his walk.

"I come from Mademoiselle Adrienne de Bowmanville."

"My royal mistress's Treasurer—I shall have a supper after all," thought the Norman. "Well, Sir?" he said, aloud.

"I have some things for you."

"My advance-pay!" only ejaculated the Musketeer. "See what it is to have faith in fortune." Then addressing the page: "What is it?"

"First, a compliment—her Majesty and Mademoiselle de Bowmanville are both pleased with your deportment to-day. Secondly, you are excused from further attendance on her Majesty till to-morrow-afternoon at two o'clock. Thirdly, Sir, the costume in

which you appeared to-day is so tasteful and elegant that it has been adopted as the uniform of her Majesty's Musketeers."

"Is that all, Sir?" said Louis, his heart sinking.

"That is all. What answer shall I take to Mademoiselle de Bowmanville?"

"That I feel honored, Sir—honored," said Louis, turning away.

"All is not well with the brave fellow," mused the page, looking after him. "His voice fell, and his step is reeling. The answer is not what he expected!"

On his way to his lodgings, Louis woke from a revery, only to find that he had involuntarily stopped and was looking in, with a dreamy eye, at a shop-window.

It was the pie-baker's!

"Heart, heart!" he murmured, starting and blushing moving on, "where is thy courage?"

Alas! the heart was hungry!

CHAPTER X.

In the evening, that is to say, shortly after dusk, Louis exchanged his Musketeer's uniform for his suit of brown, and buckling on his Toledo and dirk, went out to keep his word with the gipsy.

On walking up the street to the first corner, he perceived a swarthy, low-sized, but thick-set and evidently a powerful man, in the rough guise of a peddler, with a strap running from his neck to either end of an oblong wooden tray, with at one end a lighted lantern, whose rays revealed to the passers a tempting assortment of small toys, from one sou upward.

"How is business, friend?" said Louis, approaching and glancing over his wares.

"I am waiting for it to come, your honor," said the man, eyeing him carefully.

"When do you look for it?"

"It may not come and it may," said the toy-vender, significantly. "I have a friend, a little way off, waiting for it."

"And he doubtless has yet another?" smiled Louis, satisfied that he was talking with one of the chain of messengers the gipsy chief had spoken of.

"Who could deny it?" returned the man. "There are occasions when friends are useful. Does your honor wish to buy?"

"Perhaps, perhaps not. Who can tell? If I do, you will see me again."

"I shall be here till twelve," said the toy-merchant.

"You may see me before that," said Louis, moving on.

"I shall look for your honor."

"No one will know me in this dress?" mused Louis, glancing at the suit of brown, "and whatever adventure I fall into, no discredit will be brought upon her Majesty's Musketeers. But let us survey our plan. First, if, as I suspect, the Count with the gray eyes has thus far played the part of panderer in this, then he will not set out alone, and I must look for two, not one. Secondly, these two will not set out till after the evening-levée, which will not be for these two hours. Lastly, they will not leave the palace by the main entrance, but by the back-way, as guilt always prefers alleys to the street. O Francis, Francis!"

Paris then as now had its shop-windows, and the two hours speedily went by to the Norman, who then quietly bent his steps to the street in the rear of the palace, which was taken up on one side with the tastefully laid-out garden-grounds of the royal edifice, which were seen through a high fence of round longitudinal bars; with a large, broad gate in the centre, and several smaller ones at equal distances along on the right and left; and on the other with a uniform series of costly residences, shaded in front by a row of noble oaks, behind the trunk of one of which, about midway of the block, he took up his position.

He had not arrived any too soon; for, in a few minutes, he perceived two men, in the disguise of civilians, the noble bearing of one of whom was not to be mistaken, pass through a small gate on the left of the carriage-entrance, look cautiously up and down the street, and then set off at a quick pace to the left, talking in a low tone.

The Norman waited till they had proceeded some thirty or forty yards, and was about to follow, when he saw a man, in a rough costume, glide, with the stealthiness of a cat, from behind the second next oak, and, keep-

ing in the shadow of the trees, hasten after them with swift but noiseless strides.

"Some outraged father, husband, or lover, who has recognized and marked them!" thought the Norman, following after. "No," he added, a few minutes later, as the light of a shop-window fell full upon the unknown, "I was mistaken, 'tis one of the forces of my gipsy friend, whose wits, I see, have not been idle."

Paris, though of considerable size, was not then near so large as now, and half an hour brought the King and his companion to a story-and-a-half cottage, embosomed in a clump of stately elms, in the midst of a garden, surrounded on all sides by a high stone wall, in the suburbs.

"Is this the cage of the turtle-dove?" asked the King, with a gay laugh.

"A good one, is it not, Sire?"

"I should say so, indeed Count. But the gate is locked!"

"To which, however, Sire, I have the key," said De Bounier, taking it from his pocket, and the next moment disappearing with the King.

On beholding the pair enter the gate, the gipsy, greatly to the Norman's surprise, instead of making any effort to follow them, looked at the cottage and then around him, as if to fix the locality in his mind, when, turning on his heel, he darted off like the wind.

"Perhaps to inform the chief," thought Louis, "with whom and others he will shortly return. Therefore, let me hasten to finish the adventure alone: and thereby prevent, if possible, the first gentleman in France from the commission of an unmanly act, and from the knives of midnight but just avengers."

With these honorable reflections, the Norman approached the gate, but it was fast locked and barred inside.

He then looked at the wall, which, however, was from three to four feet higher than himself.

But, thanks to his handy training from childhood up in the woods, the fields, and mountain-steep of his native Normandy this was no obstacle.

Stepping back six paces, running forward again, and giving a bold, 1 the spring, he, the next moment, was hanging from the ledge, when drawing himself slowly up by the elastic force in his muscles, he was about to lift himself to the top, when, glancing toward the cottage, he unexpectedly saw the Count De Bounier softly come out by the front-door and sit down on the steps, as if to guard against interruption.

Louis dropped softly to the earth again, and murmuring:

"Fortunately, he cannot mount guard in both front and rear at the same time!" He stepped lightly to the grounds of an adjoining house on the left, and scaling the fence, worked his way around to the rear of the high wall, when giving a second bold spring, he was the next instant on the top, and behind a moderate-sized tree, whose foliage protected him from discovery.

Gliding along on his hands and knees to where he could command an unobstructed view, and perceiving no one on the watch, he softly let himself down into the garden, and carefully advanced toward the side of the cottage, from whence a stream of light flowed out through the white chintz curtains of a projecting window.

Approaching lightly, so as not to alarm the watchful Count in front, Louis glanced in, and beheld, through the curtains, like shadows, in the centre of the apartment, the King, with his hat in his left hand, and his right clasping the waist of the picturesque palmist, on whom he was looking down with a loving yet constraining eye, and over whom he appeared to exercise a species of fascination, which the maiden, her eyes enlarged, and her cheeks pale with terror, was making a confused struggle to resist.

CHAPTER XI.

"O Sire!" exclaimed the palmist, struggling to free herself, "release me!"

"Say you love me!" said Francis.

"I will not say what is not true. Take away your hand."

"It is true," said the King, with an arch smile, and looking at her steadily. "Come, Thisbe, be complaisant."

"O Sire, is it really thus to insult a poor, friendless girl! Release me, I pray you!"

"Tut, tut," laughed the monarch. "You do not mean it!"

"I do, Sire; I do! I beseech you to let me go. My people are pining for me, and in distress. As you are a gentleman, set me free from this odious place!"

"Your people! Gipsies! who only use your peerless beauty and palmist-genius for their own ends! Be mine, who loves you; mine, and not a duchess in the realm but you shall outvie in wealth and splendor, as you already do in loveliness. Come, say you love me!"

"Please do not talk to me in that way—don't, Sire. I do not, cannot love you."

"You can and will!" laughed the King. "Love for love is the motto all the world round; and the proudest beauty, though cold as unsummed ice at first, must yield to it in time. Say you love me, Thisbe!"

"I do not, Sire!"

"You do. I see it in your eye, whose amber depths, true mirrors of the heart, betray you. Come, confess it!"

"O Sire—your Majesty, have you no heart!"

"A loving one, my Thisbe. Dry those tears, or I shall take the privilege of an admitted lover, and kiss them one by one away!"

And he attempted to "suit the action to the word."

"Sire—your Majesty!" shrieked the palmist, breaking from him, with a desperate effort, and retreating to the furthest corner of the apartment, where, putting out her hands, with a deprecating gesture, she cried out, in an imploring voice:

"Oh, do not come near me, Sire—do not! I am but a poor gipsy girl, it is true; and, therefore, in your eyes only a thing to be insulted and abused. But, O Sire, though you may not think it, I, too, love virtue. I, too, dream of heaven!"

"Thisbe! I love you!"

"You do not, Sire; or, if you do, you ought not, for you have a wife!"

"A wife! an incumbrance, rather—a thing of state!"

"But you wooed her, Sire; all the nation knows it? You wooed her, and after, on your wedding-morn, in sight of angels and of men, promised her all your love; and therefore have not a grain for me."

"A canting churchman's notion, my dear girl! The Queen has only my hand—you, my heart!"

"Sire, I want no heart where I can not also have the hand, and please do not say again you love me."

"I do, Thisbe!"

"You do not, Sire; I feel that you do not. And if you did, it were unjust to her Majesty, who, poor lady! is now, I doubt not, pining sad and lonely in her chamber, and sighing that you do not come!"

"She hit him, then!" muttered the Musketeer.

"Thisbe, will you hear me? Will you not give me a word?"

"On anything but love. I am of the lowly, Sire, with whom love is a sacred word, than which a holier never came from woman's self nor was breathed into her ear. Please, do not talk of love, Sire!"

"I must, Thisbe. It is in my heart, and must out, or I—die!"

"Go, breathe it to the Queen, Sire."

"It is for you, Thisbe; not the Queen."

"I covet not what is another's. Be honest, Sire!"

"I will, Thisbe, to you!"

"To the Queen first, Sire!"

"These are not words for us!"

"Stand off, Sire—stand off! Though only a gipsy, I yet have honor pure as any high-born lady's; and as you are a gentleman, respect it!"

"If he do not," muttered the excited Norman, with one hand upon his Toledo, and the other ready to dash in the window, "I know one will help him!"

"You will hear me, Thisbe—me, who wildly love you!" exclaimed the King, falling back.

"Prove your love, Sire!" said the gipsy. "I am a prisoner here, where I was brought against my will. Set me free!"

"I would, but—"

"But what, Sire?"

"I love you, and I would have you where I can come and bask in the light of your dark eyes."

"Sire, I am answered!" said the gipsy, her eyes swimming. "I had hoped that you were a gentleman, till now. O, Sire—Sire!"

"I am a gentleman, Thisbe, and such you shall yet confess me. You shall be freed; but not till I have fitted up for you a palace which shall be all your own. Adieu. I will see you again on the evening of to-morrow. Your hand at parting?"

"No, Sire!"

"You are unkind!"

"I am a prisoner against my will!"

"Well, good night!"

The gipsy did not reply.

"Will you not say good night?"

"No, Sire!"

"You will think and be kinder, by-and-by!"

"Never, to you!"

"We will see! Good night, again!"

The King bowed, and went out.

"Thank heaven he did not act to make me cut him down!" muttered Louis, drawing a long breath.

A few moments later, he heard the King and Count de Bounier passing through the front-gate, which they fastened after them, and then all was still.

"Now, then, for my turn!" muttered the Musketeer. "When His Majesty calls, to-morrow-night, I do not intend he shall find in the palmist a mark for a second outrage. It may not be very considerate or loyal thus to interfere with his amusement; but I am a Norman, and the innocent, however lowly, must be protected!"

With these thoughts, he was about to tap at the window, when he perceived a hideous, tawny old crone, short, skinny, bony, and with a red handkerchief drawn up in the form of a triangular cap about her hair, and her faded striped skirt tucked up on one side, and fastened with a rosette, and partially showing a red petticoat, of which color she appeared to be proud.

"So, minx!" she growled, with a threatening frown, "You sent the gentlemen off in a bad humor—eh?"

"I did not send him off at all, Madam. He went of his own accord."

"Ah! indeed, simpleton!" sneered the crone. "He went off of his own accord—did he? How witty and bold we have become all at once!"

"I endured your brutal insolence all day without a murmur, Madam," returned the gipsy, with flashing eyes, "in hope that when the gentleman you speak of came, I might find liberty and the privilege of returning to my own people, at his hands. But that hope has proved vain. And now, Madam—now I give you notice that I shall expect the treatment of a human being, and if you refuse it, I shall give it to myself!"

"You will, hey? How brave we are! You will?"

"I will!"

"Dear me! That is so good in us, minx—so very good! How clever we are!" Drawing a whip from under her dress: "Do you know, silly fool! that before locking you up for the night, I am going to give you a small taste of this, for your rudeness to the gentleman?"

"You would not dare—" gasped the gipsy, starting.

"O! indeed, minx! What airs we put on, to be sure! I would not dare, forsooth! The good Virgin have mercy on us! I, that have worked the very rheumatism out of my shoulders in persuading rebellious young creatures not to be unkind! I would not dare, eh?" Advancing with a frightful, glittering frown, flourishing the whip, and suddenly bringing down the lash with a loud snap on the maiden's shoulder, and drawing on the tender flesh a line of blood. "Does that look like it, my dear?" again applying the lash, "or that—or that!"

"Mercy—help, mercy!" cried the gipsy with a piercing shriek. "Do not smite me again," crouching in a corner, and imploringly throwing up her hands, "do not. Ah!" as the blows rain down, "help—murder—help! help!"

The window was dashed in with a crashing noise—a man leaped into the apartment—an uplited sword descended, and the upraised hand of the furious crone was separated from the wrist, and fell to the floor with a dead sound!

"My preserver, again!" shrieked the

maiden, leaping to her feet with a bound, and throwing herself on his breast. "I am saved, saved, saved! Ha! ha! ha!"

The old crone stood like one stupefied.

"Courage, fair one—courage!" said Louis, to the still quivering palmist. "You should not have had a blow, but that I could not stir the fastened sash. Courage, girl, courage; you are avenged!"

There was a sound, as of many running; the next instant, the main door was burst in, a rush of footsteps followed, and a moment later, a throng of wild, picturesque gipsies, each armed with a long, curved knife, filled the apartment, crying:

"Who has harmed Thisbe? Who has injured the star? Who hurt the flower?"

"Behold her!" cried the palmist, pointing to the crone. "Look! there is the whip with which she—"

A confused movement of the gipsies interrupted her; a dozen knives glittered in the light; an appalling scream fell on the ear; a rush, a crash, a groan, and the old hag sunk, a hacked and bleeding mass, to the floor.

"Paris is a great city," murmured the Norman, on returning to his lodgings, after having relinquished the gipsy palmist to her friends; great in villainy (thinking of De Bounier and the crone); great in wildness and prompt, instinctive justice (thinking of the gipsies); great in wrong (thinking of the injured palmist); great in domestic unhappiness (thinking of the Queen); but after all (thinking of Adrienne), great in beauty, virtue, grace, devotion, and all that gives to life hope, bright thoughts, and happy dreams (thinking of himself); great in fellows with high thoughts, princely suits, and lofty airs, as if they owned all the world, but nevertheless, for want of a sou in their pocket, often go to bed supperless. Ah, well (referring to himself), it is poor blood that repines. One ought to hold up his head to fortune as to men, and keep up a cheerful heart, let come what may. Besides, we have not done so very ill to-day; we have made some friends, had a uniform adopted, and helped a virtuous maiden in extremity. Therefore, courage, heart—courage!"

CHAPTER XII.

The next day was a blue one at the palace.

The King was pale, absent-minded and melancholy; and was heard every now and then to give vent to a deep sigh. He was kind to all who spoke to him; acceded without a word and without thought to every suggestion of his ministers; granted without hesitation every petition; and was so generous in word and deed to everybody, that a heartfelt wish went up from nearly all at court that the uneasiness, whatever its cause, might be removed.

In fact, his Majesty was the embodiment of sadness.

The Queen, to whom he had shown the respect and honor of former days, and who, surrounded by her maids and several others, whom her apparent return to favor had drawn toward her, had begun again to hope, was also pale and sad from sympathy, and turned every now and then from her favorite seat in the divan, to watch for a change in his countenance, which, however still remained the same.

The Count de Bounier, too, was pale; because, as many thought, his master was.

Adrienne de Bowmanville also was pale—perhaps from sympathy for her mistress, though it must be confessed her paleness did not begin to manifest itself till after she had evidently observed that the Queen's Musketeer—by all odds, in his uniform, the handsomest man at court—was, singularly enough, even paler than the King; while none could make the faintest guess at the reason of the monarch's paleness, most naturally attributed it to bad news of some mysterious kind from abroad.

As for the Count with the gray eyes, whom everybody knew to be in his Majesty's confidence, it was presumed that the cause must be of a fearful nature indeed, to make his cheek blanch, as he was not wont to yield to trifles.

As for the Queen, whose unhappy position had much secret sympathy, her paleness was easily accounted for, as was that also of her favorite Adrienne, who was supposed always to feel as her mistress felt.

But no one could understand the paleness of the Musketeer, which puzzled the King,

puzzled the court, puzzled the Queen, puzzled everybody.

That the paleness of all these personages was owing to the same cause, was at first generally believed. But this impression disappeared before the reasoning that they did not move together, had only a public communication, and dwelt, so to speak, in different spheres.

What, then, was the cause?

Let us, who have some glimpse of preceding facts, endeavor to penetrate the mystery.

The evening before, his Majesty and the Count de Bounier proceeded in high spirits to the cottage in the suburbs; the former a second time to tell the gipsy of his love; the latter to keep watch without.

But in knocking at the door the Count received no answer. A second summons proving alike fruitless, he stepped around to the nearest window, from which, however, to his surprise, streamed no light, and which, on closer inspection, was found to be dashed in.

"Strange work has been going on here!" he observed to the King. "I must understand it. Your pardon awhile, Sire."

Creeping in through the broken window, and groping his way to the housekeeper's room, and striking a light, he returned to the main apartment, where he discovered the old harridan lying in a heap and in the midst of a pool of blood which had welled out from a dozen wounds, any one of which was sufficient to have sent her to her account.

"Behold, Sire!" he exclaimed, turning to the King, who was gravely looking in through the gap in the window.

"I see," said Francis, "we must have been followed last night. The dove has escaped. We have had our journey for our pains. Let us return."

Beauty commands the eye; virtue, the mind; disappointment, the feelings; and these united, the heart. Therefore, the King slept but little; therefore he thought much of the gipsy; whom he now wished he had set at liberty, in accordance with her expressed desire; and therefore, deeming her henceforth lost to him forever, when morning came, he woke pale and melancholy.

Perhaps his love was real—perhaps not; We shall know in good time. But if it was sincere, where was the hopes of his unhappy lady?

The Count de Bounier's paleness had a manifold cause. The cottage that had been forcibly entered, was his; the harridan that had met her fate so justly, his trustiest myrmidon; and it galled his proud nature to the quick that any one should dare, for any cause, to intrude in his affairs.

Moreover, the mystery of the slaying and of the gipsy's escape nettled him; while he also saw in the latter incident a weakening of his hold upon the King, who had been accustomed hitherto to regard him as infallible. Worse than all, his keen eyes discovered in the monarch's gloom a genuine attachment for the gipsy, who, if she should come to power, would be sure not to forget the author of her perilous adventure in the market-place, her abduction from her friends, and her treatment at the cottage in the suburbs.

As for the Musketeer, whose modesty would not let him ask for an advance upon his pay, the present was the third day since he had tasted food; a fast very simple in itself, but which has always been successful in depriving the cheek of its bloom.

Nevertheless, as this was unknown, everybody was surprised at his paleness, which was mentally attributed, by most, to excitement from some daybreak-duel in which he had killed his man.

None guessed at the real cause; while, as for the proud Norman himself, he would have died sooner than reveal it, even to humble Jacques Fromage, for whom he had the friendliest feelings in the world.

Shortly before the court broke up, the Queen called him to her, and said to him, with a smile that showed the sincerity of her interest in his welfare:

"You are not well, my Musketeer?"

"Oh, indeed, your Majesty," said Louis quite grandly. "Who says that?"

"It's plain to everybody."

"Everybody is very often mistaken, your Majesty," blushing returned Louis, quite ignorant of his appearance, and trying to look very well, indeed. "I myself am not conscious of any illness, which," he added inly, "is no lie, for I am only hungry."

"Perhaps you have heard sad news, Sir?"

"I, your Majesty? Not at all."

"You are a strange man, Sir," smiled the Queen, mentally proud of his high spirit.

"Have you anything on your mind?"

"Certainly, Madame. Who has not?"

"I mean anything serious?"

"To me, your Majesty—yes."

"Why do you not tell it to some friend, and thereby roll off the burden? That is the natural course."

"Ah! Madame," said the Norman, glancing at Adrienne, who blushing dropped her eyes, "I am forbidden that relief."

"You ought to see the party, Sir Musketeer, and, explaining the effect upon your mind, obtain his permission."

"The party is not a gentleman, your Majesty, but a lady."

"Young?"

"In the very blush of womanhood, Madame."

"Then the more likely will she be to grant your suit. See her, Sir."

"Alas! Madame," said the Musketeer, again glancing at the favorite, who once more dropped her eyes, "my relations with the lady are such that I may not call upon her, except at her own request."

"I am sure the lady would be both proud and grateful for your visit," pursued the Queen. "What think you, Adrienne?"

"A call by so distinguished a gentleman as Monsieur de Lemmonier would be regarded as a high honor by any lady," replied the favorite, with a roseate blush.

"See there now, Sir Musketeer!"

"Your Majesty and Mademoiselle de Bowmanville give me courage. I will make the venture."

"Do so," said the Queen, really alarmed at his paleness. "And that you may make it with greater confidence, we excuse you from duty for this evening, when we design to keep our own apartments."

"Thanks, your Majesty!"

The Queen and her women now made a movement as if about to retire, upon perceiving which, Francis instantly came forward, attended by several gentlemen, and, gracefully tendering his consort his hand, said, with the affable smile of depression:

"Permit me, Madame, the honor of escorting your Majesty!"

"Thanks, Sir," said the Queen, her hand trembling in his, "my best thanks. I fear your Majesty is ill!"

"We are not indeed so happy as we could wish, Madame," answered Francis, carefully preserving the King from the man.

"Would you, Sire, but let poor me be nurse to your Majesty, it would be, on my part, such joy as—"

"We thank you, Madame," interrupted the King, with freezing politeness. "Your Majesty is very kind. We thank you!"

The Queen's hand, as it lay in his, almost instantly turned cold, and her Majesty's self walked forward with difficulty.

Francis immediately repented. But it was too late. The mischief had been done.

He resigned her to her women at the door to her private apartments, and then proceeded to his own, followed by his gentlemen, one of whom presently returned to the ante-room, and said to the Norman, who was in the act of turning from the palace:

"His Majesty desires a word with the Queen's Musketeer."

"Pardon, Sir," returned Louis, surveying the messenger with a satiric eye. "Have you not forgotten something?"

"I, Sir," said the latter, coloring, and far from pleased with the Norman's threatening tone.

"You—"

"What have I forgotten?" demanded the Lord, sternly.

"Think."

"It is for you to think, Sir."

"Indeed! Can you obtain leave of absence for twenty minutes?"

"To what end, Sir?"

"I will tell you that behind the coppice at the extremity of the Carmelite convent."

"I will meet you there twenty minutes after your interview with his Majesty," said the Lord, promptly. "The name of your friend?"

You will learn that on the ground."

"Mine is the Count de Bounier," said the Lord, expecting to intimidate the Norman.

"I did not ask his name," said Louis, dryly.

"You are welcome to it, nevertheless. Are you ready, Sir, to follow to his Majesty?"

"I am always ready. Lead on."

"Her Majesty, the Queen, has an order for her Musketeer," said a page, "and requests his presence immediately."

"Lead on, my friend," said Louis to the page.

"How is this, Sir?" said the Lord, in astonishment. "I thought you were going with me!"

"Your thought was wrong," coolly returned Louis. "You see I am going with this gentleman."

"What! would you insult his Majesty?"

"I, Sir! How could you think it! Insult the King? 'Tis as much as one's head is worth!"

"But, Sir," said the Lord, pale with mingled indignation and perplexity, "what answer shall I take to his Majesty?"

"Sir," said Louis, haughtily. "I have received no message from his Majesty, and therefore have no answer to send. But should his Majesty demand an explanation, you are at liberty to say that in delivering what he was charged with, the messenger so entirely neglected propriety in one part as to render the other unreceivable."

"Sir," said the Lord, the hot blood rushing up to the very tips of his hair.

"You may add," pursued Louis, calmly, "that her Majesty, the Queen, takes precedence of all the world with her Musketeer, who, when on duty, is subject to the orders of his royal mistress alone; but who, when off duty, will, if so desired, very cheerfully wait upon his Majesty."

"Sir," said the Lord, "is it possible you will send this answer to the King?"

"I, Sir?" returned Louis, motioning the page to move on. "I send no answer at all. I simply suggest what you may say, partially to excuse yourself for the insufficient delivery of his Majesty's command."

With these words, he disappeared with the page, leaving the Lord, who could scarcely credit his senses, in a stupor.

In a few moments, Louis stood before the Queen, who was reclining on a lounge, with her favorite standing beside her, in a gorgeous oblong apartment, whose perfumed air he immediately recognized as that of the chamber in which he had conversed, bandaged, with the unhappy lady.

"Sir Musketeer," said the Queen, observing him attentively, "do you know where you are?"

"In the presence of my royal mistress, your Majesty," replied Louis, remembering the order of the mask.

"'Tis well, Sir," said the Queen, pleased with his discretion. "We have sent for you to say it is our wish our Musketeer should ride to and from the palace on richly-caparisoned horses of the simplest and purest breed."

"Very well, Madame," said Louis, as though he had millions with which to perform with credit his individual share in this costly equipment.

"You will therefore, Sir, in the week to come, purchase for yourself a steed combining elegance of appearance with great power of endurance."

"You shall be obeyed, Madame," said Louis. "A horse that will cost a hundred crowns—the saddle, housing, bridle, and stirrups as much more—and I, with not a sou in my pocket, and a stomach that has not had so much as a mutton-pie in three days!" he continued to himself. "I am getting on!" Then speaking aloud, he said, "Of what color must this horse be, your Majesty?"

"Black," said the Queen, at a whisper from her favorite.

"You shall be obeyed, Madame. When must this horse be had, at furthest?"

"In one week from to-day."

"Something is afoot," muttered the Norman. "Should your Majesty chance to be at the window at half-past one o'clock on the seventh day from this," he said, aloud, "you will see, approaching the palace, a Musketeer mounted on a horse equal to the finest and royalist in France." Then, adding to himself, "And I, who am to make this tremendous purchase, have not in my pocket the first sou, and my prince-suit, having been once worn, would not bring me twenty crowns at most. Fortune is trying to smother me!"

"We shall be at the window, Sir Musketeer," said the Queen.

"Thanks, Madame. Has your Majesty any further commands?"

"None, Sir."

"No suggestions as to the saddle, saddle-cloth, bridle, or stirrups?" pursued the Norman, as though his purse were lined with gold. "Your Majesty would not wish them to be excelled by those of any other gentlemen in Paris, of course?"

"We have such confidence in your taste, Sir, that we leave everything of that nature to you."

"Thank you, Madame. Has your Majesty anything more to say to me?"

"Only that you have our best wishes, Sir."

"You overwhelm me, Madame," said the Norman, bowing himself from the apartment. "A splendid horse within a week, to say nothing of the expense of keeping him, nor of the trappings, and I without a sou, and no prospect of any for a month!" he added, in raillery to himself. "Fortune is in love with me to-day!"

As he was proceeding along the passage to the ante-room, he heard at the same moment a light running step behind, and his own name called in a delicious, thrilling whisper, that set his heart leaping wildly.

"Monsieur De Lemmonier," said the owner of the voice, with a smile of such sweetness, it was no wonder the Norman scarcely knew whether he was in paradise or on earth, "her Majesty wishes you not to draw upon your private fortune for this, and therefore sends you an order on the Treasurer of State for five hundred pistoles, which you can draw immediately, and which will enable you to purchase and support your horse with dignity."

"Five hundred pistoles—fifteen hundred crowns!" murmured the young man, half bewildered. "Is it a dream?"

"What ails you, Musketeer?" said the favorite, catching him by the arm, and looking him anxiously in the eye.

"Me, Mademoiselle?" said Louis. "What does ail me?"

"You are staggering, Sir!"

"The air is very close, I feel its pressure upon my chest," said Louis. "And no wonder," he muttered, in an undertone, "for the chest is empty! Did I understand you to say I could draw the five hundred pistoles to-day, Mademoiselle?"

"Immediately, Sir, this hour. Do you like your service?"

"Who is it asks, Mademoiselle—Mademoiselle de Bowmanville, or her Majesty?"

"Mademoiselle de Bowmanville, Sir," said the favorite, "that she may be able properly to reply when questioned upon the subject by her Majesty, who is desirous of the happiness and content of her Musketeers."

"Will Mademoiselle permit me to speak out?"

"Freely, Sir."

"Then I would say, Mademoiselle—pardon, Mademoiselle, but you have a small, exquisite hand. Will you permit me to look at it?"

"Is that what you would say, Sir Musketeer?" said the favorite, archly.

"Mademoiselle, I have not before seen a pretty hand since I left Normandy. Pray let me take it in mine and look at it for a moment."

"There, Sir. But, hold—you need not raise it to your lips!"

"Ah, Mademoiselle, do not be offended. That was only my homage to nature for a glimpse of her masterpiece. Pray, let me hold it awhile in mine."

"Why should I, Sir Musketeer?"

"When we see a rare and beautiful flower, do we not love to smell its perfume. True, it is not ours, and its owner may grant us the privilege, or not, as she pleases."

"Is that a good reason?" archly asked the favorite, in the meanwhile suffering her hand, which was small and beautiful, to linger unwithdrawn in his.

"Do you wish a better?"

"Answer me, first."

"Say it fulfills part of the purpose of a hand?"

"What part?"

"The conferring of happiness upon a poor Norman gentleman, who, Mademoiselle, would die with joy could he but call it is. You have taken it away!"

"You have not answered my question, Musketeer. Are you satisfied with your service?"

"Pray give me your hand again!"

"Are you satisfied with your service?"

"Did I know my Captain, my Lieutenant, my comrades!"

"Fie, Sir. You must not seek to know them!"

"But, Mademoiselle, I ought to know somebody."

"It is your privilege, Sir."

"I mean some one interested in the corps, some one whom I may once in a while address as a comrade; say," diffidently and with a blush, as if in confidence, "her Majesty's Treasurer, for example!"

"Hush, Sir!"

"One ought to have a comrade, Mademoiselle."

"Had you not better go and draw your money, Musketeer?"

"To a comrade, if a friend, one could tell in private, all his hopes and fears, all his thoughts and feelings."

"The Treasurer will be gone if you do not make haste, Sir."

"We can shake hands with a comrade, at meeting and parting, and when sad, as all will be now and then, each can cheer the other up, I pray you, Mademoiselle, to give me a comrade. A comrade can advise me, and in sundry ways help him. I am young, new to Paris and the Court, and need friendly counsel and suggestions. Pray give me a comrade, Mademoiselle."

"I am not the Queen, who is the head of the Musketeers, as the King is the head of his own Guards."

"True. But you are her Majesty's Treasurer, who, if so disposed, could give me for a comrade, a friend, a counselor. Mademoiselle De Bowmanville, who would make, I know, the most charming comrade in the world."

"What do you want of Mademoiselle De Bowmanville?"

"To have the privilege of calling to see her."

"For what, Monsieur De Lemmonier?"

"To tell her my views about the corps."

"What else?"

"To tell her my feelings, my hopes, my fears, how fortune deals with me. To ask her counsel in my difficulties. To give her, in return, when she asks it, my counsel."

"Aught more?"

"I should want the privilege of shaking hands with her, both on meeting and separating, which, after all, Mademoiselle, would be only comrade-like, you know."

"That is true, M. De Lemmonier, anything further?"

"I should want her to call me Louis, not Monsieur De Lemmonier, because 'How do you do, Louis', 'Good-bye, Louis', would be more comrade-like, and just like the Guards, who never call each other Monsieur So-and-So, but Louis, François, Jean, or as the case may be."

"I will think of your proposition, Sir, and let you know."

"Do, Mademoiselle."

"In the meanwhile, Musketeer, the Treasurer of State is waiting to pay you five hundred pistoles, and her Majesty is expecting me."

"True, Mademoiselle," said Louis.

"Then why do you not take advantage—"

"Of the hint, Mademoiselle?"

"No, Sir, the suggestion."

"Before doing so, Mademoiselle, I would ask a question and a favor. Is her Majesty pleased with her Norman Musketeers?"

"Very well pleased, Sir."

"A circumstance has occurred, and I may appear on duty to-morrow and I may not; in which latter event, it would be well for her Majesty to have ready to do her honor some other member of the corps."

"Is this the favor?"

"No, Mademoiselle, it is to ask whether you would have pity on a poor Norman gentleman, who would rather have your favor than that of all the world, and crown this day's good fortune by shaking hands with him?"

"Certainly, Monsieur De Lemmonier—"

"Please say Louis, Mademoiselle."

"Why, Louis?"

"Louis is a so much shorter name!"

"So it is, indeed, Monsieur De Lem—"

"Louis."

"Musketeer, I am not your comrade yet?"

"Is it necessary to be my comrade before you will say Louis?"

"Not necessary, but—"
 "Say Louis."
 "Louis."
 "Thanks, Mademoiselle—thanks. Now, then, again: Will you shake hands with me?"
 "Certainly, Louis. There!"
 "I mean with both hands."
 "You are unconscionable!"
 "With both hands is so comrade-like, so whole-hearted, Mademoiselle—may I say Adrienne?"
 "Why Adrienne?"
 "It is so sweet a name, and then it is so much shorter than Bowmanville! May I say Adrienne?"
 "What will you ask next, Musketeer?"
 "Say Louis."
 "What will you ask next, Louis?"
 "If you will shake hands with me with both hands?"
 "There."
 "Thank you, Adrienne!"
 "The Queen is ringing for me, Louis."
 "God bless you, Adrienne!"
 And the young man, trembling with wild joy, reeled from the passage into the throne-room, where, when he appeared, a page said to him:
 "The King requests the presence of her Majesty's Musketeer."
 "Lead me, Sir," said Louis. "I shall have a supper to-night, after all!" he ejaculated, inly. "See what it is to keep one's head up, and have confidence in fortune!"

CHAPTER XIII.

The Norman followed the page to a magnificent private apartment, whose walls, besides being hung with tapestry, were sumptuously ornamented with choice paintings from the world's most renowned masters, and the sides with busts, statues, and statuettes, in bronze, by the immortal Benvenuto Cellini.

On one side, before a writing-desk of polished rosewood, over which hung a full-length portrait of the Queen, sat Francis, with his elbows on the desk, his chin in his upraised hand, and his face turned with thoughtful impatience toward the door.

"So, Sir," he said to the Musketeer, "you have come at last!"

"As you see, Sir," returned Louis, respectfully, and by no means intimidated or overawed.

"Are we not of as much importance as the Queen?" continued the monarch, sharply.

"Of as great importance—yes, Sir. But as the head of the Musketeers, my royal mistress, in my eyes, when I am on duty, takes precedence even of your Majesty."

Both the King and the page looked in astonishment at the utterer of this bold reply.

"Retire," said the monarch to the page.

The latter bowed himself out, muttering:

"If that speech does not settle the business of her Majesty's Musketeers, the King is not the man I take him."

And the youth hastened to tell it to his companions.

"Do you know, Sir," said Francis, stately, "you have uttered treason?"

"Is it treason, Sir, to be true to my position?"

"Did her Majesty teach you that?"

"No, Sir. I drew it in with my mother's milk and my father's instructions, that a soldier on duty should know no orders but those of his legitimate commander."

"Perhaps you are right," said the monarch, more resolved than ever to win to himself the trusty and brave-spoken Norman.

"I am certain of it, Sir."

"Are you," smiled the King, with an air of melancholy. "Well, be it so. I have sent for you to—(suddenly checking himself)—but are you now on duty?"

"No, Sir."

"Very well. I wish to confer with you, and to ask your assistance."

"Any aid I can render to you, Sir, consistently with my position as her Majesty's Musketeer, will be esteemed by me a privilege."

"Is that a court formalism, or from your heart, Sir?"

"I mean it in sincerity, Sir."

"I will do you the justice, Monsieur de Lemmanier, to say I believe you."

"Thanks, Sir. He is speaking as Francis, not as the King," mentally observed Louis.

"It is of some private affair—perhaps the gipsy. I must be upon my guard."

"Some time since," began the monarch, "I saw, for the first time, the celebrated palmist and dancer, Thisbe, the gipsy, the same whom you recently saved from death in the market-place."

"I remember, Sir," said Louis, coloring at the flattery, which, however, did not agree with his sense of delicacy; and presuming to be only a prelude to some improper proposition, he comprehended the need more than ever of standing sentinel to his honor. "You saw the palmist for the first time, Sir," he added, suggestively.

"She was beautiful as a houri; had lips on which we could sigh life away, and fancy earth elysium; and eyes that ravished every sense, till earth seemed no longer earth, but the delicious heaven of which Mohammed speaks. Were you ever infatuated with love, Sir?"

"I, Sir?" said Louis, in confusion.

"You color, Norman! Perhaps I am addressing a rival!"

"Sir, I have but one heart, and that is not the gipsy's."

The monarch's brow became calm and friendly again.

"You love, then?"

"Yes, Sir."

"Long?"

"Some natures learn to love deeply in a brief season, Sir. Mine is one such."

"Then you can feel for me."

"Sir?"

"My whole soul went out to the palmist at a glance. I was not only mad, but incurably insane. Thenceforth of woman there was on earth but one—the gipsy. I could see no other before me during the day; in my dreams, she was the one bright star before whose enrapturing beauty that of all others was as the light of a sickly lamp to that of night's queenliest star. For days, for weeks, I tried to see her; but in vain: she either suspected or had been informed of my passion, and retired from the wealthy localities, which she till then was wont exclusively to frequent, to the market-place and precincts of lesser note, and so eluded me."

The King paused; but his auditor making no comment, he went on.

"At length I learned her address, and, attended by a companion, arrayed like myself in a disguise, waited on her with the plea to have my fortune told, but in reality to behold, converse with, and, if possible, woo and win, the arch enchantress whose peerless beauty had enslaved me."

"What followed, Sir?" asked Louis, remembering the story of the gipsy chief.

"She looked at my hand, which was trembling with wild joy at contact with hers, and then, the rich blood in her brunette veins mounted like a gush of bright crimson to her pearly cheeks, up into my eyes, with a flash of virtuous reproach, when, abruptly dropping my hand, she indignantly retired."

"She had recognized you, Sir?"

"Yes—despite my disguise, and pretended humbleness of fortune. She had scarcely gone, when a body of wild gipsies thronged through the same door, with vengeance in their eyes and weapons in their hands. De Bounier (my companion) and I had a struggle for life, but we finally got off, not, however, without carrying with us, in this hour of confusions, evidences of the fight."

"You did not go again?"

"No, not there. But still to see and tell the gipsy I loved her, was a necessity. Love was devouring and pushing me on to madness. De Bounier came to my aid. He has, among others, a cottage in the suburbs, to which, abducting, he conveys my idol."

"Then you really love the gipsy, Sir?"

"Norman!" returned Francis, in a hollow voice, "have I not said so? Love her? Look you, Sir. On the faith of a man, on the faith of Francis, King of France, in the gipsy I have loved for the first time!"

"And your professed attachment for her Majesty, Sir—"

"Was honest, but only a boyish passion; for I was then a green youth, and taken by every pretty face, but by hers the deepest, and so wooed and wedded her; but only to find, love's festive season once o'er, that I had been too precipitate, and taken for a life-mate one whom my heart could scarce endure alter a single year; and so both our days have since been as those who are tied together by a chain they would, but cannot sunder."

"And yet the Queen, whom he mistakes, loves him!" mused the Musketeer. "But shall I tell him so? No; his mind is now filled with another, and it would be useless. Another time will come. I'll wait!" Then addressing the King, he suggested the thread: "The Count De Bounier had a house in the suburbs, to which, abducting, he bore the gipsy?"

"Yes; and the following evening, attended by the Count, I saw the maiden, to whom I told the story of my love. But, far from receiving it, she repulsed both my love and me; bade me remember my vows to the Queen; talked like the high, virtuous woman she is; demanded her freedom, which I, like a dolt, refused; repelled my love and offers alike, with indignation; and would not say 'Good night' to me at parting!"

The King paused, shaken.

"Well, Sir?"

"I was again to see her the ensuing evening. But judge of my feelings on proceeding with the Count to the cottage, to find the window stove in, the housekeeper's hand cut off, and herself mangled and dead, and the gipsy nowhere to be seen."

"She had fled?"

"She had. We had been followed the night before (the Musketeer felt his heart beat) but by whom we cannot guess (Louis breathed again). She had fled; and yet, though she refused, upbraided, defied, fled from me," pursued the King, "yet, despite all this, and though she may herself not think it, yet, Norman, the gipsy is in love with me!"

"I do not think it, Sir," said Louis, shaking his head.

"I saw it in her eye."

"Granting that it be so, Sir, which I do not for a moment believe, what then?"

"She must be mine."

"She will not be yours without marriage, Sir."

"Then by marriage it shall be!"

"Impossible, Sir. You forget yourself—the Queen!"

"The Queen? A divorce. I have influence with his Holiness of Rome, who will untie the ungrateful knot, and set me free. The dispatch is even now being drawn, and will be ready in eight or nine days, when it will at once go upon its mission."

"How long has this been in your mind, Sir?"

"Since mid-hour of last night. Why do you ask?"

"Merely for the satisfaction of a thought. Has your Majesty communicated your intention to any one?"

"Only to De Bounier, and my Minister of State."

"How many mistresses has the Count, Sir?"

"A hundred, for aught I know."

"How many your Majesty's Minister of State?"

"A dozen, possibly. Why do you inquire?"

"I only asked, that, when you hear, Sir, your intention is known to all Paris, your Majesty need not be astonished."

"Known, indeed! Who should tell it? De Bounier, in whose bosom secrets are as safe as in the grave; my Minister of State, proverbial for the closeness of his lips? Yourself—the soul of honor, and, therefore, will not betray it to the Queen?"

"You may trust, Sir, that the Queen or any one else shall not hear it from me. For her Majesty knows it already," uttered Louis, inly, who now began to understand, or at least to suspect, the Queen's design in ordering her Musketeers to supply themselves with horses. While her lord ruins, she means to countermine. Good! I know one Musketeer, who will work hard to aid her!" Then raising his eyes to those of the King, he asked, "Your Majesty's object in communicating what you have to me?"

"I wish you to be the bearer of the dispatch."

"Impossible, Sir?"

"Why so, Sir?"

"I am in her Majesty's own service."

"But will not be long. The Queen is a falling woman."

"Pardon, Sir. In that case, her Majesty has at least one friend, one Musketeer, who will stand by her to the last, and, if needs be, faithfully shed in her cause every drop of blood coursing in his veins."

"Indeed!" said the King, his brow contracting. "A traitor, then! His name!"

The Norman rose, and calmly drawing himself up to his fullest height, answered, with an air at once dignified, thrilling, and imposing: "Louis de Lemmonier, Sire!"

CHAPTER XIV.

Francis stared at the Musketeer.

"You will fight against me, your King!" he observed with a threatening frown.

"I did not say that, Sire."

"But you mean it!"

"No, Sire; I simply say that, as one of the Queen's Musketeers, I will die, if necessary, in defence of her Majesty, let her foes be whom they may."

"You are insolent, Musketeer. Do you see that door?"

"I do, Sire."

"Go out, Sir—go out!"

Louis bowed, and carefully keeping his face to the King, proceeded to comply.

"Stay; come back!"

Louis replied not; but, still facing the King, continued to recede.

"Do you hear, Norman? Come back!"

But the order might as well have been addressed to empty air. The Musketeer, whose face was aglow with feeling, did not pause till he had passed the threshold.

"Monsieur De Lemmonier, do you hear?"

"What is it your Majesty does me the honor to say to me?" said Louis, gravely.

"Come back, Sir."

"Pardon, Sire. But you just bade me to go out. I have done so; and from where I stand, am ready to hear whatever your Majesty has to say."

"Come back, Sir."

"I will not, Sire. Never again, under any pretext, will I enter your apartment!"

"Sir!" The King's eyes fairly shot fire.

"I have said, Sire!" answered Louis, proudly folding his arms.

"What ho, my Guards!" shouted the angry monarch, impatiently stamping his foot.

His Majesty was well attended; for he had scarce uttered the word, when the guard appeared.

"Seize yon bold thunderer," he exclaimed, imperiously, "and away with him. I'll tame his proud Norman blood, or I am not King of France!"

"Your sword, Monsieur de Lemmonier!" said the Captain of the Guard.

But if his Majesty's blood was up, the Norman's was also.

"My sword!" he answered, unsheathing it with a sweep. "Never. My life, first! Stand back, Sir! I owe you no malice, but whoever takes from me my Toledo must have in his veins better blood than channels in your veins or those of any of your troop!"

"Surround him, Guards!" said the Captain.

The order was no sooner given than obeyed, and all was in a moment confusion; in the midst of which the Musketeer's sword was seen flashing around him in the crowd like a fabulous angry serpent, hissing, leaping, and wriggling in every imaginable direction in the air.

"Off, Guards!" cried the excited King, carried away by the young man's gallantry. "Fall back, and retire!"

The confused knot unwound itself; the Guards stepped back, to form into line; but as they withdrew from around the Norman, four of those nearest him fell to the floor, without word or sign.

The monarch was aghast; the Guards stupefied; the Norman himself still in an attitude of self-defence.

It was all only the work of an instant, but of what an instant!

"Are they dead, Chabannes?" said the King.

"Dead, Sire!" said the Captain.

"Take them away," said the monarch, gravely. "Follow us, Musketeer."

And he led the way to another apartment.

"Now, Sir," he said, sternly, "what apology have you to offer for drawing your sword in the presence of the King?"

"None, Sire."

"What apology do you offer?"

"None, Sire. My life is forfeit. Take it."

"I will pardon you on one condition."

"Name it."

"Enter my service."

"I am in the Queen's, Sire."

"The Queen's? Her Majesty's time is short. Six months at furthest, and men will say of her, 'the former Queen!' Where will you be then?"

"Perchance a seedy follower of the poor lady; perhaps her Musketeer still; it may be in heaven. Who can tell? I am no prophet, Sire."

"Be wise, Monsieur De Lemmonier. A lieutenancy in my Guards, now—in six months, the captaincy!"

"Oh, Sire! is it well thus to tempt a gentleman from his honor?"

"Monsieur De Lemmonier!" said Francis, sternly. "Reflect, Sir! your life is in my hands!"

"Take it, Sire, or cease reminding me that I am only in the service of her Majesty!"

"I pardon you, Sir," said Francis, designing to overawe him. "But I shall look for you to take my dispatch to Rome. In the meanwhile, Sir, as you doubtless have influence with the gipsy; see her, tell her how I love her, and ask her, in my name, when and where she will honor me with an interview. Do these, and fortune awaits you. No words, Sir. I will not be refused!"

With this observation, the monarch, waving his hand to the Musketeer, retired.

"The King half disposed to fancy the strange Guardsman an enemy, and a duel or my hands—I am getting on!" mused the Musketeer, turning from the palace. "But, patience! have I not an order on the royal treasurer for fifteen hundred crowns? is not her Majesty pleased with me thus far? am I not at length about to get a supper? and, more than all, may I not hope that Adrienne, the bright star of my hopes and dreams, looks upon me with a generous eye? No, heart! we are not so badly off. Therefore, let us take courage; let us draw our fifteen hundred crowns; let us go and pay that Lord off for his disrespect to our honored mistress; and after, let us, with our tall friend Jacques Fromage, sit down to a royal supper."

The royal treasurer had gone home; but his assistant had not, and Louis was shortly on his way home, with three small buckskin pouches filled to the neck with gold, which, arrived at his lodgings, after taking out three pieces for his immediate necessities, he stowed away in a closet, which he carefully locked, when, calling Jacques Fromage, in whose courage and coolness he had confidence, he informed him that he had a quarrel on hand in which he wished his assistance as second, and then set out for the place of meeting, where he found his opponent, the Count de Bounier, and two other courtiers already awaiting him.

"You are late, Sir," said De Bounier, with a dry smile. "It is now near twilight."

"Your friend will find me early enough for his business," returned Louis, throwing his hat and shoulder-cloak to Jacques Fromage. "And if he does not complain, you need not."

"Who is your friend, Sir," said the Lord, "that my friend the Count may arrange with him the terms of combat? Is he a gentleman?"

"Both my friend and I are gentlemen enough for all here, if necessary," answered Louis. "As to the terms of combat, that is a matter to be arranged wholly and exclusively by ourselves. They are simply these: We have come to fight; therefore, Sir, draw your sword as quickly as you know how, for I have business somewhere that needs must be attended to, and the sooner this little affair is brought to a head, the better."

"But, Sir Musketeer," interrupted De Bounier, "this is very irregular. The ground is to be chosen, and the preliminaries agreed upon; but before these can be done, it is necessary for us to know with whom we are to engage. If, as I suspect, your friend is not a gentleman, the fight cannot go on, or till he has left the field."

"If you have any doubts of the gentility of my friend, Count, I will satisfy you upon that point after I have paid my respects to your principal. As to the ground, place your man anywhere, and I shall be satisfied."

"Excuse me, Musketeer," said De Bounier, with a satiric smile, and haughtily drawing himself up. "We are gentlemen, and particular with whom we associate. The fight either shall not go on, or you fellow must leave the ground."

"Fellow!" exclaimed Jacques Fromage,

his eye flashing lightnings. "Insolent Lord, you lie!"

"Jacques, my friend," interposed Louis, patting him on the breast, "you are quite right; the Count does lie. But—"

"Musketeer," cried the King's favorite, whipping out his sword.

"No bravado, Count. It is thrown away on me. My friend shall not leave the ground, and the fight shall go on. Therefore, Sir (to the principal), to your guard; for I came here to give you a lesson, and I am in no humor to be balked, I assure you."

"One word first," said the courtier. "Why did you force this quarrel on me?"

"You mistake, Sir," returned Louis. "It was your disrespectful language in reference to my royal mistress that forced the quarrel upon me."

"As how, Sir?"

"Sir, you are sadly wanting in good manners. In delivering your message, you had the very bad taste to say: 'His Majesty desires a word with the Queen's Musketeer.'"

"What should he have said?" fawningly demanded the owner of the gray eyes.

"Sir," said Louis, satirically saluting him with his sword, "your principal and yourself are both wanting in good breeding, or you would not have had need to put that question."

"Did you come from Normandy to teach manners to gentlemen of the court of France?"

"No, Count, not gentlemen. They are already taught. But at the Court of France, as elsewhere, are to be met persons claiming the title, but wanting in the breeding of gentlemen. And when I come in contact with such, I have a Norman habit of giving them a few suggestions. You should have remembered the rank of my royal mistress, Sir (to his opponent), and thus have said: 'His Majesty desires a word with the Musketeer of her Majesty the Queen.' Because, Sir," he added, throwing himself into position, "I am particular about the honor, the position, and the dignity of her Majesty, and will not suffer any person, whether gentleman of the court of France or not, to treat them with disrespect."

"Very well, Sir," said the Lord putting himself into position. "Come on."

Like every member of the court, he was an expert fencer. But then, in the Musketeer he had to do with the son of a Norman gentleman whose life had mainly been spent in the harness of battle, in which he had acquired very high distinction, and who had communicated his own genius, with the sword, to his boy.

Therefore, as, in combat, next to courage, skill is everything, in five passes, the Musketeer sent the sword of the courtier flying through the air.

"Strike!" said the latter.

"No, Sir," returned Louis. "I did not come here to take your life, but simply to remind you that a gentleman of the court of France (I say it not in satire), ought always carefully to respect the honor and dignity of his Queen." Then picking up and gracefully tendering the weapon, he added: "Take your sword, Sir; and for the honor of human nature, henceforth bear in mind that he alone is noble who as carefully renders honor to whom honor is due as he is jealous of the respect which is due to himself."

"I accept the suggestion and thank you for it, Sir," returned the Lord. "And I will frankly say now, what I before would not, that in speaking of her Majesty as I did, I justly laid myself open to the censure of all high-minded gentlemen, among whom, Monsieur De Lemmonier, I take pleasure in saying, I accord you a distinguished place."

"I thank you, Sir," said Louis. "Gentlemen, are you all satisfied?"

"Perfectly," was the response from all but De Bounier.

"Tis well, Sir. Good night, and pleasant dreams to you." Turning to tall Jacques: "Come, friend."

Half an hour thereafter, in a private box in a restaurant, two persons might have been seen doing ample justice to a repast fit for a prince.

"Are you satisfied?" asked one, when both had finished.

"Ah!" said, with a sigh, the second, who was somewhat taller than his companion, and evidently of humble station. "That is a question which touches me. I am not satisfied."

"No? Then make yourself so. The fishes are not half cleared, and there is wine enough still left to—"

"I don't mean that," interrupted the other. "But you asked me if I was satisfied."

"So I did. Was that not right?"

"No. You ought to have said: 'Are you filled?' 'Are you satisfied?' has another meaning altogether."

"Jacques, my friend, the wine has made you very critical. Well, then, are you filled?"

"Up to the very lips."

"Do you wish any more."

"Not a morsel. But I am not satisfied."

"No? Why not?"

"I am only a butcher's assistant, and I am ambitious."

"Proper ambition is a virtue. To what does yours aspire?"

"I wish to be a Musketeer."

"A Musketeer? What for?"

"To serve under you."

"Under me! Jacques, the mellow Burgundy has mounted to your head! With me, you mean. I am only a private."

"With you, then; though I think you must be a lieutenant, at least."

"Impossible, Jacques, my friend. The corps is already full. Besides, to whom would you apply?"

"To you, who have only to ask her Majesty, and it will be so."

"Jacques, Jacques! Burgundy don't agree with you! You ought to have chosen a less fiery wine. Where did you get this wild notion of my influence with the Queen?"

"'Tis in everybody's mouth."

"Everybody is mistaken, Jacques."

"That is not all that is said."

"No? Well, I am not astonished. For whoever talks loose in that manner, is capable of adding anything. What else has everybody to say of me?"

"That the corps of Musketeers is viewed at court as a great joke; for that you comprise in your own person, captain, lieutenant, privates, and all."

"What is that you say, Jacques, my friend?"

"That you yourself are the whole company."

"The people say that?"

"And the court?"

"How do you know what the court says?"

"The Count De Bounier's butler trades at our stall."

"And therefore, Jacques?"

"Therefore, Louis, you have only to ask her Majesty to extend the corps to two persons, instead of one, and the request would promptly be granted, and I should have my wish."

"I will think of it," said Louis, who had on this subject enough to occupy his thoughts for the remainder of the night.

"Jacques a Musketeer!" he soliloquized, at a late hour, as he lay thoughtfully upon his couch, "when only the sons of noblemen are admitted into the royal Guards. Humph! I doubt if there is much prospect for my humble friend. And yet, if it be true that the Musketeers, as a corps, is only a myth, and I comprise the whole company in my own person; and if, as I suspect, the order for the horse has a deeper meaning than appears upon the surface, why should not the corps be extended to the enormous number of two persons, instead of one; suppose, for instance, sharp work should be cut out for me—work, we will say, taking me from the city—in which (as who may tell the chances of war?) I should be cut down, what then would become of the Musketeers in whose moral strength her Majesty reposes so much hope? No, the poor lady must run no such risk. There ought, there must, be at least two in the corps. If my royal mistress refuses, why then, I will have a sub-company of my own; that is to say, I shall privately hire my tall friend, Jacques, myself, and hold him as a sort of reserve-corps, in case of need. But I have hope that, at our interview, her Majesty will see the wisdom of adding him to the corps, whether the same be composed only of one or of many. It is true he is not of noble blood; but if he can do the work of noble blood—that is to say, defend her Majesty—that ought to be enough. I'll watch my opportunity, when she is in a good humor, and speak to her about it. In unusual requests of this nature, the seizing of the proper moment is every thing. Perhaps it were

better to lay the matter before Adrienne, first. Adrienne! sweet name." And the Norman fell asleep.

CHAPTER XV.

The Musketeer's share in the incidents described in the preceding chapter made a great stir, that is to say, at court, where, next to the King, he was now the most prominent figure, and envied by his own sex as much as he was admired by the other. In the Queen's apartment, where the maids of honor, the ladies in waiting, the pages, the servants were fairly infatuated with him, seeing, as they did, the great moral power he was bringing to bear in their mistress's behalf. Among the Guards, who were furious at the loss of their four companions, and burned to avenge them, but who yet hesitated individually to call the sturdy Musketeer to account. And, finally, among the populace, who, in the promenades, the cafés, the restaurants, all the public places, could find no topic so agreeable and inspiring as that of the gallant Norman.

All of which, though patent as any other great fact to everybody else, yet was comparatively unknown to Louis himself, who only saw that the Count De Bounier looked out at him from under his gray eyes as it were, with an expression that boded him no good. That the Guards loved him as little as the King's favorite. That the King rather seemed to lend him the light of the royal countenance. That the Queen seemed to take courage and to feel stronger than before. That Adrienne appeared no longer to regard him only as a servant of the royal mistress, but as a friend, in whose fortunes she felt an interest. And the latter had the most effect upon him. For—we must confess it—the Norman thought more of one smile from the Queen's favorite than of the countenance of the King, the consideration of the ministers, and the favor of the duchesses, marquesses, countesses, and the mademoiselles, all put together.

Not that Adrienne was the fairest demoiselle at court, for many were as beautiful as she. But that she had a noble, pure, and loving nature; was as modest and gently dignified as lovely; and had, besides, a voice whose every tone was like a gush of liquid melody. And the Norman could appreciate these.

He was of that age when the eye dwells fondly on the beautiful and good; when on the ear the voice of her we love falls grater than any music; when on the heart love's image is deeply and unconsciously impressed; when love lends to life a mellow roseate hue; and existence, borne along on the wings of constant joy, passes on like a bright glad dream.

Perhaps, too, Adrienne herself, viewed the Musketeer, in turn, with similar feelings. It may be—who could say? Woman's love is not so easily read as man's. Her instinctive delicacy forbids her from permitting her love to appear too prematurely. Still it was most certain she was often observed by the Count De Bounier, whom nothing escaped, to cast her eyes in the direction of the Norman, when that worthy was gazing another way, as woman only looks when her heart is in her glance.

Precisely on the sixth day after the order for the horse, the Musketeer was seen dashing toward the palace, on a magnificent young Arabian, black as night, proud as Lucifer, of rare symmetry, with a bright-green saddle, edged with gold, and a saddle-cloth of the same brilliant color, covered with golden lilies, and bordered with a long sumptuous fringe, also edged with gold.

As he approached the palace, he looked up at the windows of the Queen's apartments, and beheld not only the Queen herself, but Adrienne and all the maids of honor, observing him, with proud smiles. At the same time, he was particularly delighted to see that Adrienne also courteously smiled, and her approving glance touched him nearer, thrilled him with keener satisfaction than did even that of the Queen.

Giving his horse in care of a groom, he made his way into the palace, where he found himself the observed of all observers, for the Queen's windows had not been the only ones from which his arrival had been discerned.

As he entered the ante-room, a page informed him that his presence was required by the King, whom he found alone, and with in his girdle a paper in an envelope of white silk.

Louis shuddered; for his foreboding heart

told him the probable character of the paper, and the monarch's design in sending for him.

"Good afternoon, Monsieur De Lemmonier," "what news have you for me?"

"Concerning whom, Sire?" returned Louis, calling up all his presence of mind, for the conflict he seen before him.

"The gipsy."

"None, Sire."

"Sir!" said the King, with a slight frown, "You have forgotten that I bade you seek the gipsy out, tell her how I love her, and learn from her when and where she would grant me an interview."

"Pardon me, Sire, I had not forgotten it."

"You have seen her, then?"

"No, Sire."

"But you have tried?"

"No, Sire."

"No, De Lemmonier!" said the monarch, sternly.

"I cannot help you, Sire, in any attempt to dishonor your Majesty's royal consort."

"Sir!" said Francis, turning pale, and stepping back a single step.

"I am a gentleman, Sire, and the thing your Majesty proposed is not for me!"

"Proposed!" said the monarch, his voice, like his features, changed with passion. "It was an order, Sir."

"And, therefore, not for me. I am in her Majesty's service, Sire."

"This—this to me!" said the King. "Beware, Sir!"

"I dealt honestly with you, Sire, as became a gentleman of France, but your Majesty would hearken to no refusal."

"It was my will, Monsieur De Lemmonier."

"So be it, Sire. Your Majesty is King of France."

"But it would seem not your King, Sir."

"Yes, Sire, my King, but only as Francis the monarch, not always as Francis the man."

The King fell back another step, and looked in astonishment at the man who dared talk to him thus.

"Look you, Monsieur De Lemmonier," he said, presently, determined yet to conquer him. "Your fortune depends upon your friendship or enmity to your King. Choose, Sir!"

"Sire, I already am your friend—your true friend, though your Majesty may believe it not; and my friendship is best shown in my refusal to aid or countenance you in anything unworthy the dignity of Francis, King of France."

"No impertinence, Monsieur De Lemmonier. I am myself the best judge of what comports with my own dignity."

"You are right, Sire. But will your Majesty permit me to suggest that I have two Kings—the one your Majesty, whom I am bound as a true subject in all state matters loyally to obey; the other, Monsieur De Lemmonier, Sire, whose honor I am equally bound, in all things, to guard."

"As I live, I believe you place your second before your lawful King."

"Bid me rush on to death for you, Sire, and I will, without hesitation, and without questioning. But ask me not to perform aught conflicting with the nice sense of honor of a Norman gentleman; for that I will not do, even for your Majesty."

The monarch's cheek flushed, and his eyes shot forth threatenings.

"I think, Monsieur De Lemmonier, you are presuming to read me a dishonoring lecture; in short, to impute to me dishonorable conduct to my face!"

"You misapprehend me, Sire."

"Your meaning, then, Sir, and that very quickly."

"This, Sire. That as the friend of your Majesty, I will not do anything that shall cause you to think less of me, now or at any future time; that as the friend of the lovely gipsy—I am her friend, Sire—I will not, knowingly, be instrumental in bringing her to shame and sorrow; that as the friend of her Majesty, the Queen, I will not take a single step to add to her unhappiness; and, finally, Sire, that as the friend of Monsieur De Lemmonier, I will not give his enemies an opportunity to say that he ever wooed the smiles of fortune by the sacrifice of his honor."

"Enough," said Francis. "We need not discuss the matter further. Presuming that you, too, were a lover, I had hoped in this for your sympathy as a man; for if we may not look for aid from those circumstanced in

heart as ourselves, to whom may we? I knew, also, you had influence with the gipsy, and—but let it pass. I will be my own friend. Do you see this paper?"

"I do, Sire."

"It must at once to Rome, the road to which is dangerous, and may be pursued only by men of heart. Will you take it?—a State matter."

"I am not free, Sire."

"But you may be, if you will."

"I am in her Majesty's service, Sire."

"You can get her Majesty's leave, with a word," said the King, determined to follow him up.

"Pardon me, Sire, but I may not say that word."

"Sir!" said the monarch, bent upon overawing him.

"I may not say that word, Sire," reiterated Louis, perceiving the monarch's aim.

"You forget, Monsieur De Lemmonier—with me, fortune; against me, ruin! Your election."

"I am in her Majesty's service, Sire."

"Be cautious, Monsieur De Lemmonier. Reflect. Six months hence, there will be no her Majesty. Reflect, Sir."

"I have reflected, Sire."

"And your answer is—"

"I am in her Majesty's service, Sire!"

"Mark, Sir," said the King, hastily going to a table and taking up a pen, "I have but to write an order to my Chamberlain, and you are from this hour excluded from the palace."

"I can serve her Majesty as well without the palace as within, Sire."

"I have but to write a second order to the Governor, and you are excluded from Paris."

"I can serve her Majesty as well without the walls of Paris as within. A courier can bring me my orders."

"A third order, and you are banished from the soil of France."

"I still can serve her Majesty, Sire. There are other countries, other courts, other kings."

"A fourth order, Norman, and your head is on the block."

"At death, Sire, all service is at an end."

Francis dropped the pen.

"Look you, Monsieur De Lemmonier," he said, admonishingly, "fortune is worth the cherishing. Three months hence, her Majesty's drafts upon our royal treasurer will be paid no longer. What will follow, then?"

"Who may say, Sire?"

"I will tell you. Her Majesty's maids-of-honor, servants, all, will desert her for a service where they will get paid. Her Majesty divorced, homeless, moneyless, friendless—Musketeer, what will follow then?"

"To her Majesty's Musketeer, Sire, she will still be his Queen, he still her Musketeer; and he will follow her, attend her, guard her, up and down the world, till in some sister queen or monarch, more generous than her own lord, she shall have found a friend, who, in pity for her unhappy lot, will kindly take her in."

Francis, nettled, eyed the young man awhile, as if to read him to the soul, and then paced the chamber in silence, and with rapid strides.

"Why so obstinate, Norman?" he demanded, at length. "Why should you rashly pit yourself against your King?"

"I do not, Sire."

"Have done with this. At once to her Majesty for a few weeks' leave, and off with this packet, without delay, to Rome. No words! I will have it so! Why are you not gone, Sir?"

"Honor will not let me, Sir."

"Monsieur De Lemmonier, will you force me to remember that I am your King?"

"Honor will not let me, Sire," iterated Louis. "I must stay and protect her Majesty, who, poor, unhappy lady, while I am absent, will not have a single friend in all France."

"Protect her, Monsieur De Lemmonier! From whom?"

"From you, Sire!"

The King, his eyes glittering, his countenance flushing, and his frame trembling, impetuously stamped his foot.

"Monsieur De Lemmonier, are you mad?" he demanded, fiercely.

"No, Sire."

"Protect her Majesty, my wife, from me, her husband?"

"From you, Sire, should you attempt to harm her," said Louis, with a calm and un-

daunted, but respectful firmness; "from every witling at court, who, on seeing the humor of the King, to flatter him, may be disposed to treat her august Majesty, my royal mistress, with one faint vestige of disrespect!"

"And you dare to talk thus to me, Sir—to me, your King?"

"If I have said aught amiss, Sire, pardon me, I meant it not. I am only a poor Norman gentleman, with no other fortune than my sword, and no higher ambition than by standing loyally by my position to watch over the interests and the happiness of my honored employer and Queen."

"In one word, Norman, will you or will you not woo fortune in my service? No prevarication—a blunt answer!"

"Sire, you have told me that danger and persecution await my royal mistress. I stand by her Majesty."

"Enough!" said Francis, biting his lip.

"There are other men in France. Go, Sir!" Louis bowed and went out.

The King blew an ivory whistle. A page appeared.

"Call the Count De Bounier. Count, it is decided. You must with the packet to Rome."

"Very well, your Majesty. When must I set out?"

"On the third day from this."

"Tis well, Sire."

On passing into the ante-room, Louis was summoned by a page to the Queen's apartments.

Her Majesty was in her boudoir, and attended only by her favorite, whose eye lit up with a quiet sparkle of proud joy as the Norman entered.

Louis perceived by their features that they had been weeping, though at what, he could not conjecture.

"Welcome, my Musketeer," said the Queen, with an assumed cheerfulness, it was quite plain to the observant Norman she did not feel. "You ride a gallant horse."

"An Austrian, your Majesty, that, as I am assured, and I myself believe, has not his peer in France for intelligence, obedience to the bit and spur, endurance, and speed," returned Louis, hoping to inspire her with courage, in case, as he suspected, the order for the steed had in it a deeper meaning.

The features of the Queen instantly became radiant with satisfaction.

"Thanks, Sir, for your good taste," she said, with a charming blending of genialness and dignity. "You may yet have occasion in our behalf, to put to the test the powers of the animal."

"I was right in my guess—the order for the horse had a higher object than the mere eclipsing of the King's Guards!" thought Louis. "I shall be most happy to try those in the service of your Majesty," he replied, aloud.

"Are you familiar with the saddle, Sir?"

"From boyhood upward, Madame, it has been with me a passion and a joy."

"Indeed! Have you ever undertaken any long journeys?"

"Not many, indeed; but I have been in the saddle long hours at a time. With an occasional rest, I could, if necessary, ride day and night for forty days. The hardy air of Normandy, and the vigorous training from a daily acquaintance, since boyhood, with her rugged hills and picturesque streams, have prepared me for whatever task may be before me, in your Majesty's service, or my own."

"You could, then, my Musketeer, if need be, undertake a long and arduous journey, and at short notice."

"At a moment's, your Majesty."

The Queen smiled upon him, and then turned, with an inquiring eye, to her favorite:

"Madame, the Queen may not say more to her Musketeer upon this subject, at present. But I, her friend, may add that certain events, highly affecting her Majesty's happiness, may make it advisable for her to prepare for a critical emergency, which may come at any moment. In view of which, her Majesty's Musketeer will please to hold himself in readiness for a long journey at a moment's notice."

"I shall obey, Mademoiselle," said Louis, with a low bow. Then, turning to the Queen, he added: "Has your Majesty anything further for your humble servant?"

"Nothing, my Musketeer."

"Then, if you will permit me, Madame, I have a suggestion to make. I have a friend, Madame, of humble birth and fortune, but brave and true, and devoted to your Majesty,

whom, in case your corps be not filled, I could recommend as one who would make a worthy Musketeer."

"The corps is already filled, Monsieur De Lemmonier. Is it not so, Mademoiselle De Bowmanville?"

"It is, your Majesty."

"You hear, Sir?"

"I do, Madame. But should the events to which Mademoiselle De Bowmanville has alluded, take the turn anticipated, I could not set out with heart, if I felt that your Majesty had not near you some devoted servant who would watch over my royal mistress, and—and—it may be, yet another, as over a pearl of great price."

The Queen was touched, and she glanced at Adrienne, who, too, was penetrated; for she readily comprehended who was the other to whom the young man referred.

"There is no telling what is in the future, Madame," pursued Louis, seeing that neither spoke, "nor how soon your Majesty may need a brave heart or a true sword, and my humble friend has both of these."

"Are you aware of anything threatening her Majesty's happiness?" asked Adrienne, in agitation.

"It would not be right to betray my interview with the King," thought Louis. "Nothing, Mademoiselle."

Both the Queen and Adrienne saw, in an instant, that he knew something that he was bound by a nice sense of honor not to reveal. Moreover, they had previously learned from a page that he had been closeted with the King.

"But you suggest—you recommend, Monsieur De Lemmonier," said Adrienne, hesitatingly, "to make a still further addition to her Musketeers?"

"Yes, Mademoiselle."

"Your friend is trusty and devoted, you say?"

"Trusty as good steel, devoted as high loyalty."

Adrienne looked at her mistress, who returned her glance with one that said, "I leave all to you."

"I presume room might be made in the corps for your friend, Monsieur De Lemmonier," presently. "But it would just be necessary for her Majesty to know something more of him. Is his appearance such as would reflect credit upon the Musketeers?"

"A manlier figure, walk or face, may not be found at court, Mademoiselle. His name is Jacques Fromage. He is scarcely more than twenty-five years of age. Is of humble birth, but has a noble soul."

"Her Majesty will give you an answer in a moment, Monsieur De Lemmonier. Madame, the Queen, will your Majesty grant me a moment?"

The Norman retired toward the door.

In a few moments, Adrienne approached him with a purse of gold.

"What is this for, Mademoiselle?"

"For a horse and Musketeer's uniform for your friend, Jacques Fromage, Sir," said Adrienne, with a smile so sweet it was no wonder it sent a thrill through the young man's frame.

"Has her Majesty any further word for me?"

"None, Sir, except to wish your friend every joy, and you good day."

"Her Majesty is very kind, Mademoiselle, and you—"

He paused, overcome by emotion, and was about to spring forward to bend in grateful homage to the Queen, when he discovered that the latter had disappeared.

"Will you shake hands with me, Mademoiselle?" he said, blushing.

"Why not, Musketeer?" said the favorite, with a low, gushing laugh.

"With both hands?"

"If you will have it so, Sir."

"You are an angel, Mademoiselle."

"Hush, Sir!" laughed the favorite again, releasing her hands from his lips. Her Majesty is waiting for me. Bring your friend in his uniform to-morrow, and be here yourself at this hour in three days."

Tall Jacques was taken all aback by the favor, which he could hardly realize.

"And yet why should I be surprised?" he muttered to himself. "Did not Louis ask for it? and lives there any one, who, knowing him, could refuse him any request? How can I thank you?" he said, with emotion, to the Musketeer.

"By always remembering," answered Lou-

is, "that her Majesty, though a Queen, is yet a poor, unhappy lady, making a brave effort for her position, and, surrounded by open and secret enemies, stands in need of all the help, the courage, and the vigilance of her Musketeers, on whom, and her own woman's heart, she must alone rely."

"I shall remember, Louis."

"Thanks, Jacques. Good-night. God bless you."

"A second Musketeer, Sire!" said De Bournier, in a whisper, to the King, in the throne-room, the following day. "It will be a whole regiment next!"

"I see," said Francis, observing Jacques, who, with his musket and uniform, and standing near the Norman and a little off from the Queen, was repaying with interest the stares of the courtiers. "Some scheme is afoot."

"Yes, Sire, thanks to the cunning head of the private councillor, Mademoiselle De Bowmanville! Were it not well to separate her from her Majesty?"

"How, Count?"

"By dismissing her from court, as dangerous."

"Why should I?"

"For your own sake, Sire. So long as her Majesty has Mademoiselle to plot and scheme for her, even so long all your Majesty's efforts for freedom from your nuptial tie will be abortive."

"Believe you so?" said Francis. "Umph! I'll think of it!"

CHAPTER XVI.

On the evening of the following day, Louis, disguising himself in his suit of brown, and buckling on his sword, strolled to the gipsy quarter to see the palmist, whom he found without difficulty.

She blushed, and her dark eyes sparkled with satisfaction, as he entered her small apartment, which was tastefully, and in a manner luxuriantly, furnished with whatever could conduce to her comfort; each article being a friendly gift from some member of the tribe, all of whom regarded her with mingled affection and awe—and as the possessor of a divining power which with many was a pretence, but in her a reality.

"Welcome, my preserver!" she exclaimed, warmly giving Louis her hand. "How goes fortune with you?"

"Well," said Louis, perceiving that she was struggling with melancholy, and that the sweet tones of her voice were plaintive with sadness. "And with you?"

"With me?" returned the palmist, with a constrained smile, which yet told of a sorrowing heart. "Well—very, very well!"

"Pardon," said Louis, shaking his head, and observing her with feeling; "you are not!"

"No?" said Thisbe, a tear springing to her lids, but still with an effort to appear gay. "You jest!"

"You are unhappy."

The gipsy burst into tears.

"You love?" said Louis, taking her hand and leading her to a seat.

The palmist replied only by a sob.

"Be frank," said Louis, kindly. "I am your friend. Trust me. No father, brother, mother, even, could sympathize with you more kindly than will I. Trust me. You love?"

The gipsy's face was bowed upon her hands; but through the quivering fingers escaped a word in a low, heart-rending voice, and that word was.

"Yes!"

"Some gipsy?"

"No."

"The King?"

Thisbe was silent.

The countenance of the Musketeer became grave.

"Do you remember his coming here in disguise?"

"Too well."

"Your abduction hence to the cottage in the suburbs?"

"I do."

"What passed between you and the King there?"

"Yes."

"And yet you love him?"

"I love him."

"Woman, woman! who may read thee!" murmured Louis. "Farewell!" he said, aloud, rising.

The palmist, pale, trembling, and in tears, sprang to her feet.

"On, do not go, do not condemn me!" she cried. "You said but now you would sympathize with me like a brother."

"Have you seen the King, since the scene at the suburbs?"

"Yes," blushed the gipsy.

"Often?"

"Once."

"When?"

"Last night, in answer to this," taking a note from her breast and handing it to the Musketeer, who, opening it, read as follows:

"Thisbe, I must, I will see you. I love you as man never yet loved woman. For your sake, I am about to take a step that shall make you Queen of France. Grant me an interview, or I shall die. Meet me two hours after dark under the great oak in the main avenue of the park opposite the town-house. I shall be in the guise of a student. You will know me by a white feather in my cap. Come, if you love me, if you would not to-morrow see France without a King. Yours, and yours only, FRANCIS."

"You went?"

"Yes."

"To let him know you loved him?"

"No, on my honor. But to tell him I never could be his!"

"Did you mean it?"

"As a virtuous maiden!"

"I believe you, palmist!" said Louis, with a respectful bow. "Did the King discover that you loved him?"

The gipsy blushed, but did not answer.

"He asked you for a second interview?"

"He did."

"You promised it?"

"I refused!"

"But with a wavering heart, and a trembling lip. Even now you wish he were here. Am I right?"

Thisbe burst into tears.

"I see," said Louis. "Farewell!"

The gipsy held out her hands imploringly.

"What would you?"

"My heart is breaking! Feel how it throbs!"

It was as if it would burst.

"What can I do for you?" said Louis, touched.

"Save me from the King, from my love, from myself!"

The Musketeer looked at her. She was pale, but her dark eye, bright with a sad, beseeching light, was honest.

"How save you?" said Louis.

"Take me from this—from Paris—to where I can not see the King—to where he shall never find me!"

"From this?" said Louis. "Are you not free, surrounded by friends?"

"An expression of anguish swept over the face of the gipsy.

"Do you not remember my letter?" she asked, blushing.

The Musketeer reflected.

"You said you were not your own mistress; that your movements were not governed by yourself?" he replied, presently.

Thisbe nodded.

"You are not free, then?"

The gipsy shook her head, and then placing her finger on her lip, in token of silence, opened the door, to see if any one was listening. But no one appeared.

"Who restrains you?" asked Louis, quietly, determined that she should have fair play.

"The Chief," said the palmist, in a whisper.

"For what purpose?"

"I know not."

"But you go out?"

"I am sent!"

"Then, the life you lead is distasteful to you?"

"Distasteful! Could I leave it, and gain virtuous bread, in some obscure retreat, however humble, I were happy!"

"I see. But when you go out, why not fly?"

"I am watched!"

"By whom?"

"A hundred gipsies, who mingle with the crowds I draw around me, take their stations on the corners, look on from afar off!"

Louis' brow darkened.

"Peste!" he exclaimed. "Have you ever tried to escape?"

"Three times."

"And failed?"

"I am still the gipsy palmist!" was the significant reply, delivered in a voice of anguish.

"Are you the Chief's daughter?" asked Louis, whose blood was beginning to boil.

"He says so?"

"But your own heart?"

"No!" replied the maiden.

"Hark!" said Louis, opening the door. "I fancy I heard a footstep!" he added, in a few moments.

Thisbe changed color, and went out, but presently returned, without having seen any one.

"Have you always been a gipsy?" asked Louis.

"From childhood; but I think I was not born one."

"Have you any early recollections?"

"I remember a fine lady, tall, and with dark eyes, who sometimes took me on her knee, and looked at me sadly and in silence."

"Anything more?"

"A large house, with tessellated floors, in the midst of a garden, luxuriant with trees, and vines, and shrubbery, and looking out upon a mountain in the distance."

"Aught else?"

"Nothing; and even these appear like a dream."

"I see. Have you been always in Paris?"

"No: we are wanderers, staying now here, now there, a month, a year, or years, as fortune prospers us. Since childhood, I have been in almost every city in Europe."

"Without ever discovering any place that reminded you of the house with the tessellated floors?" The gipsy bowed.

"How long have you been in Paris?"

"Three years."

"Poor girl! Would I could help you!"

"But you will!" said the gipsy, imploringly. "You will not leave me here, to the Chief, to Francis, to myself!"

The Musketeer looked at her.

"Where do you wish to go?" he asked.

"To where I shall be safe. Know you not such a place?"

Louis looked down in thought.

The gipsy observed him, as if her very soul were in her eyes.

"When do you wish to go?" he asked, presently.

"Francis may seek to see me to-morrow-night," said the maiden, dropping her eyes, while her pearly cheeks were suffused with a blush, deep as crimson.

"But you need not be at home."

"When I yesterday received his letter, I felt as if not to see him would kill both him and me!" was the plaintive reply, yet in a tone whose significance could not be mistaken. "Be a friend—a brother; save me from myself!"

"I will!" said Louis, touched to the heart by that pleading voice. "But," puzzled, where shall I take you to? Have you no friend?"

"None but you in all the world."

The Musketeer rubbed his mustache.

"I could take you to my lodgings," he said, presently, with a deep blush; but it would not be decorous; and besides, the Chief would call there the first thing." After a pause

"Do you wish to go to-night?"

"This hour—this minute!"

"See what it is not to have acquaintance!" muttered the Norman, in perplexity. "To take the poor soul to an inn would be equivalent, in publicity, to the market-place. To convey her to my lodgings would only be to peril both her good name and my own, without doing her any good, for the Chief would be certain to discover her; and where else to go with her surpasses my comprehension. Peste! if, when making me, Nature had only with my clay mixed a small modicum of wit! Do you think you dare trust yourself with me?" he asked, to gain time, for an idea.

"You are a brave man, Monsieur de Lemonier; and only cowards take advantage of the helpless!"

"But, I may have to take you to my lodgings?"

"You are a gentleman. I shall be safe there!"

"The idea don't come," muttered the Musketeer. "If fortune would but have pity on me! Can we get away unseen, think you?" he asked.

The gipsy's eyes sparkled. She comprehended that he had at length concluded to take her under his protection.

"Thanks, thanks, Sir!" she cried. "I will see to that. Wait at the corner till you feel an arm in yours. It will be mine!"

"Farewell!" exclaimed the Musketeer.

"It would never do to take her to my lodgings; and therefore, Fortune, I trust to thee! I will wait for you," he said, in a whisper. Then adding, "Good night!" in a loud voice, for other ears, if any were listening, he withdrew.

The gipsy dropped upon her knees.

"Betriend me, 'Thou!" she resumed, in anguish. "Save me from him who traffics in the divining gill 'Thou hast given me; from him who would take advantage of my youth; from myself, who dare not trust mine own heart!"

In fifteen minutes, the Musketeer felt a light arm in his.

"Now, when Fortune directs!" he muttered, still in perplexity.

He looked around, to see if they were watched, and perceiving no one, whispered to the gipsy, who had on a mask and domino, "Come!"

He walked on awhile, scarcely speaking a word, and at the end of a quarter of an hour found himself in a street shaded on both sides with trees and at a gate, with a high rounded top, opening into a hard pebbled path, through a magnificent garden, behind a large, stately structure with numerous windows, through whose carnation-colored curtains, tastefully ornamented with blue oblongs edged with gold, streamed a rich flood of brilliant light.

It was the gate to the Queen's household in the rear of her palace!

Louis, still retaining the gipsy's arm in his, passed in and along the graveled walk to five stone steps, which he ascended, and tapped at the door.

"Whom do you wish to see, Monsieur?" said a stout man in livery, on replying to the summons.

"Mademoiselle De Bowmanville," said Louis, astonished at his own boldness.

"Walk in," said the man.

The Norman's heart beat high.

Twenty minutes later, he turned from the palace, to his lodgings, alone. He had, in a private interview, related everything to the Queen's favorite, who, on hearing it, had, in the kindest manner, agreed to take the gipsy under her protection.

He staggered to his lodgings as if drunken. What had led him to the gate? Was it Louis' instinct?

CHAPTER XVII.

The King was pale and gloomy again. The court could not understand why; they could only discover and feel the fact. Nor did they sympathize with him, as before. For whereas, on the former occasion, his change arose from love's melancholy, in which state he granted without question every petition; on the present, it came from love's disappointment, which begot moroseness, and he would grant nothing.

He would receive no petitions, hear no suggestions, sign no papers, and converse with no one save the Count De Bounier, and with him only in snatches.

He was pale, nervous, morose, and as nobody could get his signature to any bill or petition, everybody was pale, nervous, and morose, too.

That is, everybody but the Queen, Adrienne, and the two Musketeers, who, though also pale and nervous, were not at all morose; and at least three of whom, that is her Majesty, Adrienne, and Louis, could perhaps give a very accurate guess at the cause of the King's gloom.

As to tall Jacques, to whom Louis had not deemed it necessary to communicate what had become of the gipsy, that worthy had no clue to the monarch's dismals at all.

Nevertheless, as we have said, all four were pale and nervous as well. The Queen, because that day was, as she knew, to be an important one in her history. Adrienne, from sympathy for her mistress, and it may be for the Musketeer, also. Louis, in sympathy for his royal mistress, for Adrienne, and for the gipsy, but principally for Adrienne. And Jacques, in sympathy for Louis, whom he loved better than any friend, truer than any brother.

The morning-levee broke up precisely at twelve o'clock, a few minutes before which it was observed that De Bounier kissed his master's royal hand with unusual fervor, and took his leave as though he designed not to return again for some days.

"Monsieur De Lemmonier," whispered Adrienne, as the King was rising to give his hand to the Queen.

"Yes, Mademoiselle."

"Follow to her Majesty's apartments. Hush. Important!"

Louis bowed, comprehending from what had been said to him before, that the time had at length come for a bold movement, in which, if the King mined, the Queen, for her own safety, was resolved to countermine.

"Do we wait for instructions?" asked Jacques.

"I, yes; you, no," said Louis. "I will see you on my return home."

"Very good," said Jacques, who looked upon the Norman as his real commanding officer.

On reaching her own apartments, the Queen dismissed all her attendants, save Adrienne, who, at her command, instantly summoned the Musketeer.

"I am at your Majesty's orders," said Louis, advancing to the Queen, who appeared to be under deep feeling.

"Monsieur De Lemmonier," said the latter, "your devotion to my cause up to this moment commands my warmest gratitude; and this the more, because I am a poor lone woman, and among all the court of France, I have but one manly heart on which alone I can rely."

"You overrate your poor servant, Madame," said Louis, blushing. "And I must add that you have at least two friends—Jacques Fromage and myself—who are ready, if need be, to die for your Majesty."

"Thanks, my Musketeer, for such assurance. In my future thoughts and hopes, I shall not forget Monsieur Fromage."

"Oh!" thought Louis, "if Jacques were only here to hear himself called by her Majesty, 'Monsieur Fromage!'"

"I am about to give you my confidence, Monsieur De Lemmonier."

"You are very gracious, Madame. But, unless it will be a relief to your royal mind, I pray you not to. I am ready to do whatever you may simply order, satisfied that in serving your Majesty I am only standing up for the right."

"No, Sir; it is due to so true a friend as yourself that you should know at least so much of my position as will enable you to think and act intelligently in the fresh service I am about to ask at your hands."

"As your Majesty pleases."

"I learned, a few days since, that his Majesty had it in contemplation to apply to Rome for a divorce, on grounds unworthy of him and me; and as my fame is dear to me, and moreover believing his Majesty to be acting under improper influences, I instantly resolved, under the encouraging counsel of my friend, Mademoiselle De Bowmanville, to make a true woman's struggle for the purity of my name."

"It was a brave thought, Madame," said Louis, his eyes sparkling, "and worthy of your Majesty."

"Thanks, my Musketeer. You give me courage. In accordance with the suggestion of my friend, Mademoiselle De Bowmanville here, I have drawn up an autograph-letter of facts to his Holiness, which I have held ready to send off to its destination the instant I learned that his Majesty had dispatched his messenger with the application for a divorce."

"Bravo, again, Madame!"

"His Majesty's messenger sets out for Rome to-day. Indeed, he is now in the saddle, and doubtless smiling at the prospective ruin of his Queen, whose happiness, by leading her lord into evil, he has already well-nigh wrecked."

"I understand you, Madame. Your Majesty alludes to the Count De Bounier?"

"To him, Monsieur De Lemmonier."

"May I ask your Majesty's object in keeping back your autograph-letter till now?"

"That his Holiness, by having his Majesty's letter and mine before him, might be able to form an intelligent opinion of the facts, and not strike a poor unhappy lady down without giving her a hearing; at least, that she herself should not fall without first making a struggle in her own defence."

"Brave again, Madame. Whoever gets the judge's ear the first, always wins the cause."

"What am I to infer from that, Monsieur De Lemmonier?"

"This, my honored mistress: that if you would check his Majesty, your letter must to Rome the first!"

The Queen looked at Adrienne, who, her eyes sparkling, observed:

"Monsieur De Lemmonier is right, your Majesty."

"Very well," said the Queen, taking from a side-pocket a letter, in a blue silken envelope, and handing it to the Norman. "Here it is, my Musketeer. Need I say any more?"

"Only to send a good word by me to your Majesty's equally devoted friend and servant, Monsieur Fromage."

"Tell Monsieur Fromage," smiled the Queen, "that, during your absence, I shall look upon him as my only gentleman-friend at court."

"That message will lift him up to the seventh heaven, your Majesty."

"Good fortune to him and to you, Monsieur De Lemmonier," said the Queen, giving him her hand to kiss. "I shall count the days till you return!"

"The hoofs of my Arabian, Madame, are like the wings of the wind."

"Thanks, my Musketeer. I shall take courage. Adieu!"

And the Queen turned from the apartment.

"Why don't you go, Musketeer?" said Adrienne, with an arch smile. "When your Queen's interest is at stake, too. Fie, Sir."

"I was thinking of a friend, Mademoiselle."

"A dear one?"

"Very dear. A lady, so fair and true, she fills all my thoughts by day, all my dreams by night."

"Do I know her, Musketeer?"

"You may; but of her sweetness, goodness, beauty, which single her from all her sex, not half so well as I."

"You hold her high."

"She is high. Will you take a message to her?"

"Gladly. Her name?"

"Tell her, I shall be gone, I know not how long; for Rome is far, and the journey to and back unlike a walk through a sunlit street of Paris. But say to her, her image will be before me along the route to nerve me on, and make the weeks days, the days hours, and the hours moments, to beguile the tedium of time."

"Her name?"

"Tell her I shall have the memoried music of her voice in my ear, in my heart, all the way; and tell her to look well that I still find the rose upon her cheek on my return; for that if she were ill, if, in my absence, suffering or danger came to her, it would shake me like a chill. Tell her think of me as of one who every moment thinks of her; as of one who never felt the pangs of love till they came with her image, and in his heart made their home together; and (with feeling) could he but hope she would, now and then remember him on his way, he would deem it holy as an angel's prayer, and feel himself secure."

"Her name, Musketeer?" asked the favorite, pale, and her bosom heaving.

"Will you shake hands?"

"Surely. There."

"You will care for Thisbe, too—poor Thisbe—and not let the King discover or destroy her?"

"I will. Your lady-friend's name?"

"Will you bear to her, word for word, my message?"

"Trust me."

"Will you care for her, in my absence; watch over her health, her happiness, her feelings; see that not the smallest particle of pain shall come to her gentle heart, to rob her cheek of its bloom, her bosom of its joy?"

"I will. Her name?"

"Adrienne!"

"De Bowmanville?" quickly and tremblingly.

"Yes."

"Shake hands again."

"With both hands?"

"Both!"

"God bless you, Adrienne!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

In two hours, Louis had made his arrangements, shaken hands with Jacques, purchased a new suit, which really became his handsome, manly form, stored the Queen's dispatch in an inside pocket under his belt, looked carefully to his Toledo and dirk, mounted his Arabian, and left the city of Paris behind him.

"The Count De Bounier has the start of me," he ejaculated; "but mine is a gallant steed, and I must see to it, when night comes, that the King's favorite is, at least, some miles behind."

To this end, on fairly emerging into the country, he gave a free rein to his horse, which, under the impulse, also, of a slight touch of the spur, sprang forward at a gait which speedily made short work with the milestones.

At dusk, he drew up at an inn, but without having come up with De Bounier, who, he therefore concluded, must be nearly, if not equally, as well mounted as himself.

He was up at earliest dawn, and once more on his way.

About eight o'clock, he descried before him, in the distance, the dim outlines of three horsemen, whom, in about an hour, he sufficiently neared to satisfy himself that they were those of the King's favorite and two armed attendants.

"To let him see me," he muttered, "would only be to give him a possible clue to the object of my journey, which might prove fatal to her Majesty's interest; therefore, I'll take a circuitous route, and come out ahead of him."

With the Musketeer, to think was to act, and he, the next moment, turned into a cross-path to a lower road, along which he sped a few hours, when he again turned into the main highway; when, looking back, he beheld the three horsemen afar off, like so many small specks.

"Good!" he exclaimed; "the Count loves his case. As for me, I am driving for the Queen's."

In twenty days, he dismounted, covered with dust, at the palace of the Pontiff, to whose presence he was almost immediately conducted, and whom he found conversing with his Secretary in a small cabinet before a writing-table, on which were a pile of papers, writing-materials, a breviary, and, in the centre, a silver crucifix.

"From her Majesty, the Queen of France, holy Father," he said, falling on one knee, according to etiquette, and presenting the letter, which the Pontiff, a venerable old man, with mild, benignant countenance, tranquilly opened and read.

The letter simply recited such facts as are already known to the reader.

The Pontiff, after reading it a second time, bent his head awhile in thought, and, then, turning to the Musketeer, who was standing, cap in hand, a few paces off, said:

"You have ridden hard, Monsieur De Lemmonier, to have reached our city in so short a time."

"I was on the business of a persecuted and unhappy lady, your Holiness," answered Louis, modestly.

"Well said, Sir," observed the Pontiff, pleased with the reply. "Did you pass his Majesty's messenger on the route?"

"On the second day, your Holiness?"

"And left him behind you, I presume?" smiled the Pontiff, regarding, with pleasure, the splendid specimen before him of youth and vigor.

"For my royal and unhappy mistress' sake, your Holiness."

"Tis well," said the Pontiff, taking from his finger a heavy, richly-chased ring, in which was set an oval-formed precious stone, which revolved, at a touch, in two delicately-worked sockets. "Give this to her Majesty, with whose virtues we have been long familiar, and tell her to turn this amethyst, when she will perceive two words, which are our reply. Adieu!"

On the evening of the twentieth day thereafter, Louis again entered Paris, when, throwing himself from his horse, he strode hastily to the courtyard of the palace, knocked at the door he had entered on the eventful night of his first interview with Adrienne, and two minutes later was kneeling before the Queen, who had dismissed all of her women but her favorite, and delivering the message of the Pontiff.

The Queen turned the revolving amethyst, and read, in letters engraved in the stone, these words:

"Fear not!"

Her Majesty, who, till now, had been on tenterhooks with anxiety, was too full to speak. She silently gave her hand to the Musketeer to kiss, and then retired, with Adrienne, to give vent to her feelings in joyful tears.

"I have brought good news," mused the Musketeer, who had been too honorable to turn the amethyst; "and, if so," he added, with a dry smile, "how De Bounier will love

me when he discovers it was I who rendered his journey to Rome fruitless!"

"Monsieur De Lemmonier," said a gushing voice, as he was passing from the apartment. Louis turned, and beheld Adrienne approaching him with extended hands.

"Her Majesty thanks you!"

"And you, Adrienne?"

"I—I thank you, with all my heart!" said the favorite, throwing herself upon his breast.

Louis went home reeling. For in that embrace, he had pressed for the first time woman's ruby lips, and imbibed a delicious draught of her fragrant breath.

On the afternoon of the ensuing day, while in attendance with Jacques upon the Queen, he was informed by a page that the King desired to speak to him.

"So, Musketeer, said Francis, as he approached, "you have been playing truant from duty?"

"I was called away, Sire," said Louis, comprehending that the monarch was endeavoring adroitly to get at the cause of his absence.

"By business affecting her Majesty?"

"By private affairs, Sire. The affairs of the Queen are strictly private," he added to himself.

"Your own?" said the King, determined to corner him.

"Partly, and partly not, Sire," said Louis, perceiving his object, and equally resolved to thwart it. "Your Majesty is aware that no one ever does anything that affects only himself."

"No casuistry, Norman. We had thought better of you, Sir! In one word, in whose service did you absent yourself?"

"That of friends, Sire."

"What friends?"

"Friends I love, and who therefore have a claim upon me, Sire."

"Very well, Sir," said the monarch, sternly, waving his hand. "We shall have something else to say to you presently."

"I suspect upon what," muttered Louis, returning to his post. "But we have done nothing unbecoming a gentleman, and therefore, heart, let us not be overawed."

When the levee broke up, a page summoned him to the King's cabinet. The monarch who, for the last forty-two days, had been in a state of constant moodiness and spleen, was pacing the apartment with a flushed cheek and frowning brow. He turned quickly as the Musketeer entered, and said, sharply:

"Norman! what have you done with the gipsy?"

"I, Sire?" said Louis, instantly putting himself mentally on his guard.

"I think my question was a plain one, Sir! What have you done with the palmist?"

"Will your Majesty be pleased to explain?"

"S death, Norman!" said the monarch, stamping his foot, "will you give me a straight answer?"

"If you will question me, Sire, in a special manner, I shall not fail to answer specially. That which you have propounded is so general, so vague, so indefinite, that I am unable to reply."

"Look you, Sir," said the King, furiously, "I am Francis, King of France," and I warn you that I shall remember it."

"It is your privilege, Sire."

"Where is the gipsy?"

"How should I know, Sire?"

"Norman, you will make me forget myself! Once more, where is Thisbe?"

"Will your Majesty permit me to inquire why this question is put to me?"

"You were last seen in her company."

"Sire, I have not been in Paris these one-and-forty days."

"Thisbe has been missing for two-and-forty days! Where is she? Speak! No prevarication. The truth, or—the headsman!"

Louis drew back a single step, and folded his arms.

"Sir, I am a Norman gentleman, and I think your Majesty has endeavored to dishonor me by a threat."

"What then, Sirrah?"

"This, Sir," said Louis, with dignity, "that I cannot reply to your Majesty till you have withdrawn it."

"Monsieur De Lemmonier!"

"Sir, a threat dishonors both him who makes it and him on whom it is heaped, but

most especially when he who utters it is an all-powerful King, and he to whom it is made is, by virtue of the humbleness of his position, without the means of avenging himself. Take back the threat, Sire!"

"Can I believe my ears! You dare talk thus to me!"

"Sir, between gentlemen only gentlemanly words can be used. A threat from one presupposes degradation in the other, who, till the threat is withdrawn or avenged, instantly falls to a lower level. I cannot avenge myself, Sir, I am only a humble Musketeer—you, Francis the First, King of France. Therefore, it devolves upon your Majesty to execute your threat or to withdraw it. Choose, Sir!"

"As I do live, I believe, Monsieur De Lemmonier, you are presuming to give me an alternative—me, the King!"

"Sir," said Louis, "this is a question of honor, not rank; and as a gentleman I have a right, which even your Majesty may not take away, to take a manly stand for mine. Withdraw the threat, Sir!"

"Never, Norman!" furiously returned the monarch.

The Musketeer calmly unsheathed his dirk and cast it from him; then also drawing his Toledo, he held it up by the blade, and said with impressive solemnity:

"Sir, with this sword, my father, the Count of Ferat, than whom a braver or more knightly gentleman never fought beneath the royal banner, has struck a thousand gallant blows for his country and his King. When I, in my turn, was about to get out as a man-at-arms, he fastened it, with his own hands, upon my thigh, and gave it me with his blessing. Sir," added the young man, pale and trembling with emotion, "I am a dishonored man, and, therefore, unfit longer to wear an honored blade." Then sternly snapping the weapon across his knee, he laid the two pieces at the King's feet, and added, grandly, folding his arms, "There, Sir. Now call the headsman!"

If Louis was pale, the King, now, was paler still. Looking fixedly at the Musketeer, he was, for a few moments, more like a breathless statue than a living man.

Suddenly the fixed eye relaxed, his hot, generous blood shot up to his forehead, his mind underwent a revolution, when hastily stooping and picking up the two pieces of the broken Toledo, and placing them on a private table, he took off his own sword, belt and all, and offering it to the Musketeer, said:

"I withdraw the threat, Norman, and regret it; in token of which, accept my knightly blade in exchange for your Toledo, which I will have refixed, and hung up in the royal armory, as that of a brave, high-minded man, and loyal gentleman, without fear and without reproach."

"I accept the exchange, Sire," exclaimed Louis.

"Ah! Norman, you call me 'Sire' again," smiled the impulsive monarch. "It was plain 'Sir' but now! Yet, no apology. I like you the better for it. What are men if they may not fall out now and then, and fall in again! Let me buckle on your sword. No words—I will. Your father did it with his Toledo, and I will with my Venice, which will, I warrant me, do equally as good work in action. There! We are now friends again, are we not, Norman?"

"Yes, Sire. But heart," added the Musketeer to himself, "we must not be cajoled out of our self-possession, nor into betraying the gipsy, for all that!"

"Now, tell your unhappy King where his Thisbe is," said the monarch.

"That question again, Sire!" said Louis, in reproach.

"Tut tut, Norman. I am suffering. I have not seen her for four-and-forty days, and my heart is rent in twain."

"And hers, Sire!"

"She loves me, man."

"And if she does, Sire, which I will not contradict—for of such matters I personally know but little—has your Majesty the heart to take advantage of it? Think, Sire, you are the first gentleman in France. Thisbe, of the helpless, lowly; a virtuous woman, Sire—who loves her honor as the King doth his; loves the right, too, as well as he. Pause, Sire, pause!"

"Do you presume to lecture me?"

"I, Sire. Far be from me the thought

But I am of Norman blood—Norman blood, Sire, that has a knightly faith in woman's angel purity and man's eternal honor; and that never yet saw lady in distress without flying with heart and soul to her rescue, and standing up manfully for her cause. What is the gipsy, Sire, that your Majesty should strike her down?"

"Strike her down. What? Thisbe! Norman, are you mad?"

"Strike a woman's honor, Sire, and you strike herself; yea, and with a deadlier blow than had you felled her to the ground, never more to rise. Woman is as a child which has no hope save in those to whom as parents it looks up in artless confidence and trust; if they are false, cruel, unkind, it has no other help, and must suffer and go down. If, Sire, you have, as you say, the lowly gipsy's heart, you have in your keeping a holy thing; for in her love woman is pure and hopeful and trusting, looking up to her heart's possessor with the confidence of a child reposing her honor in his more than in her own will, for she knows that that inclines to him. If he betrays her, she has no other help, and, like the child, must suffer and descend. For the sake of that high honor, Sire, which alone distinguishes the brave man from the coward; for the sake of woman's angel-confidence in man; for the sake of our kind, whom every true nature joys to advance, take not advantage of the gipsy's love—strike not down the woman!"

Francis looked at him like a young colt restive under the curb.

"You are taking liberties, Sir. Be careful!"

"I did not seek this interview, Sire; but being here, I will bear me like a gentleman, who respects the Right."

"Do you impute dishonor to me, Sir?" demanded the monarch, fiercely.

"I impute nothing, Sire. I only ask your Majesty not to take advantage of a helpless maiden's love."

"You impertinent Norman! My love for the gipsy is honest. I mean to elevate her to the throne!"

"You will never do that, Sire."

"Sir!"

"You will never do that, Sire!" repeated Louis, respectfully, but with calm firmness. "Your Majesty is already wedded!"

"Rash Norman, would you heard me?"

"I, Sire, have but stated a fact."

"It will not long be one. Even now, my application is before the Pontiff for a divorce."

"Which his Holiness will never grant, Sire."

"Why, Monsieur De Lemmonier, are you mad?"

"No, Sire. Or should his Holiness decree it, there is still another power, greater than he—the people, who love their Queen, and will not tamely see her wronged."

"Norman!" cried the King, furiously stamping his foot.

"O Sire, dismiss me, or be just. Her Majesty is my Queen, and as a loyal gentleman, I may not hear a word against her and be dumb. You are trying me, Sire, beyond my strength. I pray you, let me retire."

"Go, then, Sir, since you desire it, and bear this with you: in a week, at furthest, my messenger will have returned with the divorce! In your musings, ruminate to your fill upon that!"

"You are the King, Sire," said Louis, with polite and cutting sarcasm.

And keeping his face to the monarch, according to etiquette, he bowed himself out of the apartment.

The week came and went, and brought not back the messenger. Francis became irritable. A fortnight passed, and still no messenger. The monarch grew morose.

At length, on the afternoon of the thirteenth day, De Bounier, his face livid and his gray eyes glittering threateningly at the Musketeer, appeared in the throne-room.

"You have traveled slowly, Count," said the King, irritant.

"On the contrary, Sire, I remembered at every step that your Majesty was impatiently expecting me."

"To the point, at once. What of the divorce?"

"His Holiness refuses it, Sire!"

Francis, his eyes flashing, his brows black, and his whole frame trembling, leaped to his feet thundering,

"What ho! Plant our war-banner! a

hundred thousand horse for Rome. Fore Heaven, I will make him of the tiara do penance in sackcloth and ashes, and cause such carnage and desolation as were never known since Tyre! Then recollecting himself, and indignantly at the wondering court, "At whom do you stare with gaping eyes and pale cheeks! Our levee is broken up—hence, retire!"

The hall was cleared in an instant!

"Refused, Count. Did you say refused?" continued the excited monarch, fiercely.

"Refused, Sire."

"Eternal blight upon him? Wherefore?"

"Her Majesty had been before you, Sire."

The King started, and turned pale.

"How?" he demanded, hoarsely.

"Her Majesty had been before you, Sire; as, after the refusal, I learned by chance from the mistress of his Holiness's Secretary."

"Her Majesty! Who was her messenger?"

"Louis De Lemmonier, Sire—her Majesty's Musketeer!"

"So that was his private business—the traitor!" inly ejaculated the monarch, stamping his foot, in a rage. "What ho there, Guards!"

The Guards, headed by the Captain, entered on a run. "Arrest Monsieur De Lemmonier, and away with him to a dungeon. Begone!"

"May I speak a word to your Majesty?" said De Bounier to the infuriated monarch.

"Well, Sir?"

"Not Monsieur De Lemmonier alone is guilty. There is yet another and a greater enemy to your Majesty—she who counseled her Majesty to this!"

"Her name?"

"Adrienne De Bowmanville," said De Bounier, with a malignant sparkle.

The King went hastily to his writing-table, filled up an order, and stamped his foot.

A page entered.

"This to her Majesty. Fly! Fore Heaven, I will make an example of the traitress! Well, Sir," added the monarch, five minutes later, to the page, who had returned, "what says the Queen?"

"That she lives only to obey you, Sire. Mademoiselle De Bowmanville is dismissed."

"Who triumphs now?" mused De Bounier, with a satisfied smile.

CHAPTER XIX.

The blows so quietly struck by the owner of the gray eyes fell on those against whom they were directed heavily and with surprise.

The Queen was conversing with her favorite when the page entered with the King's note, which she read at first with amazement, then with paleness, and then with a trembling which all the force of her will could not control.

Sinking back in her seat on a lounge, her heaving bosom told the favorite she had received an unexpected cause of anguish.

"Your Majesty is in pain?" said Adrienne, with solicitude.

The Queen, who could not speak, silently handed her the King's letter, which was couched in these words:

"MADAME:—I have too long endured in my household traitors to my interest and my happiness. I have already had arrested your emissary to Rome, and I now demand an immediate expulsion from your train of Mademoiselle De Bowmanville. FRANCIS."

Adrienne turned pale, but did not lose her self-possession.

"What answer shall I bear to his Majesty?" asked the page.

"Adrienne—" gasped the Queen. "Speak for me. I cannot."

"Say to his Majesty," said Adrienne, mildly, but with dignity, "that her Majesty lives only to obey him. Mademoiselle De Bowmanville is dismissed."

The page, who privately sympathized with the Queen, bowed himself out, sorrowing.

Adrienne knelt at the feet of her sobbing mistress, whose hand she raised to her lips with mingled affection and respect.

The relations of these two hearts were more those of two loving sisters than of mistress and maid.

"Farewell, your Majesty," said Adrienne.

"You do not weep—you?" said the Queen, throwing her arms about her neck.

"I, dear Madame! Alas! I feel only for your Majesty!"

"But for your Louis?"

"My Louis!" said Adrienne, very deeply shaken.

"He is in a prison. Do you hear, Adrienne? In a prison, Louis, your brave, great-hearted Louis, in a prison!"

"I hear it, Madame!" said Adrienne, hoarsely, and with difficulty.

"Why do you not weep, Adrienne?"

"I could, your Majesty, but I will not. He would not wish his Adrienne to weep."

"But it would do you good, Adrienne. Your heart is full. Weep, Adrienne, weep."

"Not now, Madame. I have need of all my thoughts and of all my strength. Will your Majesty please to tell the gipsy I will send, at nine to-night, a friend whom she may follow with confidence?"

"My rival—the gipsy! You think of her in this hour?"

"I must take care of her, Madame. Louis wished it. Will you kindly tell her?"

"Will I not? Is she not hidden in my own boudoir?"

"Thanks, your Majesty. Farewell!"

"But where are you going, Adrienne?"

"To my humble friend's, in the marketplace, from whose window I first saw my gallant Louis."

"Why there, Adrienne? Have you not higher friends?"

"Dear Madame, I shall be welcome there, however deep the frown of fortune. The linen-draper is from my own native village; his daughter and I were children together; and, though humble friends, they are true." In a quivering voice: "Farewell!"

"Till better days, Adrienne," said the Queen. "I shall see you again."

Adrienne, her eyes swimming, courtesied and withdrew.

As the door closed upon her, the Queen, who, till now, had endeavored to be calm, covered her face with her hands, and sobbingly exclaimed:

"I now have not a friend in all the world!"

The next moment, she heard near her a voice, saying:

"Say not so, dear lady, for here is one ready to lay down her life for her Majesty!"

The Queen removed her hands from before her eyes, and beheld, kneeling at her feet, her beautiful rival, the gipsy.

"Thisbe!" she cried, starting. "How imprudent! If you should be seen—"

"Do not think unkindly of me, your Majesty. I was lonely, and—"

"Have you been seen?"

"No, lady."

"At once to safety," hastily exclaimed the Queen, pushing her into an inner apartment. "Have you heard—"

"All, lady; and I have resolved upon a step which will, I think, restore peace to your Majesty, reinstate Mademoiselle De Bowmanville, and restore my good, my brave, my thrice preserver to liberty."

"You have the power to do all this—you, Thisbe!" said the Queen, in surprise.

"I do not say that, lady. I only hope to."

"When did you get this thought?"

"While overhearing, without design, what has just passed, lady."

"It is a plan, then, you are speaking of?"

"Yes, lady."

"Do you feel free to mention it?"

"I had rather not, your Majesty," said the gipsy, modestly lowering her eyes.

"Why then did you allude to it?"

"To prepare you, Madame, for my request to let me leave your Majesty's apartments immediately!"

"Thisbe!" cried the Queen in surprise. "Do you remember the danger?"

"My plan does away with it, lady. Will you please to grant me leave?"

"Have you such confidence in your plan?"

"My intuition, my reasoning, and, more than all, my divining-gift, assure me of its success."

"Your divining-gift?" said the Queen, with an incredulous smile.

"You doubt its realness, lady?"

"Frankly—yes. A few weeks since, you read my future from my hand, promising me that, notwithstanding my troubles, all would yet be well."

"And so it will, Madame. Doubt it not. I read not falsely. I know my gift. I cannot read my own fate, but I can that of others. As for yours, you will yet be happy. Believe it."

"In all the other sex. I had but one true friend, and he is now a prisoner; in all my own, but one faithful heart, and she is taken from me!"

"Your Musketeer will be free again, and

ready as ever to serve you, lady; your confidant will be restored to you; your own sorrows forever banished."

The Queen sadly shook her head.

"It will be, lady, as I have said. Will you give me leave to go?"

"Have you such confidence in your plan that you ask it?"

"I have."

"Go, then; and may Heaven prosper you!"

"All good fortune to you, lady."

"I may have erred in authorizing her to depart, and Adrienne may reproach me," murmured the Queen. "But I did it for the best."

In the meanwhile, Louis had been conducted by the Guards to the keeper of the royal fortress, who in turn introduced him without ceremony to a small apartment with stone walls, a hard floor, a small door thickly studded with heavy nails, and a small solitary window with a stout iron grate, and which had for its only furniture a broken pitcher, a low, three-legged stool, and, in one corner, a flat oblong board, on which was a tick filled with straw, and over the tick a blanket.

On delivering his prisoner to the keeper, the Captain of the Guard, a coarse-minded fellow, though a lord, could not resist the opportunity of giving vent to his hideous envy to the man whose exploits had thrown himself and company so far into the background.

"You see, Sir Musketeer," he sneeringly observed, "it is not always with us to-day as yesterday. Yesterday, you doubtless fancied yourself a person of great consequence; while to-day—to-day, you see," he added, with an insulting grin, "you are too low for pity!"

"Sir," returned Louis, with proud scorn, "there are men that I have been taught from childhood to look upon as natures like theirs deserve."

"Indeed!" said the Captain, mockingly. "I pray you, who are they? I shall be delighted to know."

"They are a species of men, Sir, that strike women and children, and insult prisoners!"

"Sir Musketeer," cried the Captain, with flashing eyes and crimsoned temples, "I shall see you again!"

"If I ever get free, you may depend upon it, Sir!" returned Louis, with a haughty glance, and following the keeper.

"I am sorry, Sir," apologized the keeper, who was no stranger to the Musketeer's fame, "to see a gentleman of your merit in the fortress, and to be under the necessity of introducing you into an apartment like this."

"I thank you for your good feeling, Sir," said Louis. "But I am a Norman, and take fortune as I find her. So," he added to himself, "a dungeon, at last. For it, I doubt not, I may thank my late fellow-journeyer to Rome, where he probably learned that taking his ease on the route was not the way to come off victor. Well," he concluded with a smile, "if I have beaten him, as his eye, when entering the throne-room to-day, assured me, I can afford him the gratification of a small triumph like this; but would recommend him, if he has any love for his skin, not to let me get too near him when I am once more at liberty."

"A letter," said the jailer to him, about an hour later.

Louis opened it, and read:

"Louis, keep up your heart; I have seen the gipsy chiet, who, in hope, through your influence, of getting back the palmist, will, at twelve to night, surround the fortress with a thousand men, and set you free."

"JACQUES."

"How will this affect the Queen?" murmured Louis. "Will it influence the King to treat her with cruelty or disrespect, as the employer of one he hates? No. For it betrays a hidden power, previously to him unknown; and men, however high, have a due regard for an opponent who unexpectedly puts out in strength. Therefore, Jacques, go on. Liberty is sweet; my incarceration here undeserved; and, if I may sleep to night at home, I'll do it, and no thanks to Francis."

But the Musketeer was not to see the daylight fade without a note from yet another correspondent.

Half-an-hour after the receipt of tall Jacques' letter, the jailer brought in a second, but scented, and in a smaller hand, the contents of which caused the young man to start. It was couched thus:

"Louis:—I have been dismissed. It was by order of the King, who, as I think, was incited thereto by the

Count de Bountier. I am at the house of a humble but true friend, a linendraper, in the market-place, who has friends among his fellow-merchants, with all of whom, as indeed with all craftsmen in the city, he tells me you are popular.

"As you would for me, were I unjustly imprisoned, I will for you. Be of good courage. To-night, at twelve, my friend, with a thousand men, will batter down the fortress, but he will set you free."

"ADRIENNE."

"Brave, good, true Adrienne!" murmured Louis, kissing the note. "Woman, though gentle in manner and tender in feeling, has yet in her bosom as brave and noble a heart as ever yet beat in the breast of man. 'Unjustly imprisoned!' Yes, that's the word; and therefore I accept the freedom offered by my friends. But, had it been justly, so strong is my respect for law, though the fortress were razed to the ground for my liberty, I'd stand firm amid the ruins, and refuse to budge a foot till legally released. But when unjustly imprisoned, it is my born right to get my freedom when and how I may. And, therefore, Adrienne, Jacques, strike for me, as in like circumstances I'd for you; and here's a heart will thank you gratefully, even if you fail."

CHAPTER XX.

On leaving the Queen, the gipsy palmist made her way without difficulty to the ante-room, and demanded of an officer in waiting a private interview with the King.

She was pale, but firm, and had in her bearing and manner that air of calm dignity which, in woman, is the outward expression of conscious uprightness of intention.

"Whom shall I have the honor to announce, Mademoiselle?" said the Chamberlain, struck by her splendid beauty and the graceful elegance of her demeanor.

"Thisbe, the palmist," said the gipsy.

The officer's hat, which till now had remained on his head, was off in an instant.

A true courtier, he remembered that this was the King's idol, and as such might yet be a personage of high consequence at court, and the dispenser of favors.

"This way, Mademoiselle," he said, leading the way, with a flourish of low bows, to the King's cabinet. "I myself will lead you to his Majesty."

"You are very kind, Sir," said Thisbe, following.

The wily officer was fancying at every step the possible magnificent reward that would be his who should be the first to introduce to the lovesick monarch the peerless beauty whose mysterious disappearance had rendered him so morose.

A few moments brought them to the cabinet, which the King, excitedly meditating upon the events of the day, was pacing with nervous strides.

"Mademoiselle Thisbe, your Majesty," said the Chamberlain, with the smiling air of one who feels that his words are welcome.

The King, whose back was to the door, turned quickly, as if doubting his ears; when, perceiving the palmist, his features lit up with blended wonder and joy, and he darted forward the next instant, smiling and with extended hands.

"Thisbe!" he exclaimed, "Thisbe, my beautiful, my loved one! is it indeed you—you, for whom I so long have sighed. A thousand welcomes!"

The palmist, with dignity, drew back.

"Thisbe!" said Francis, in mingled amazement and reproach.

"I did not come, Sir, to hear language like this!"

"Do you not love me, Thisbe?"

"And if I do, Sir?"

"Ha! you confess it! O joy, rapture!"

"You misconstrue my meaning, Sir. I did not say I loved you."

"But you do, Thisbe—you do. Deny it not!"

"Sir, I am not here to speak of one so unimportant as myself. But—"

"Unimportant—you! you, Thisbe! you who are loved by me, the King!"

"Sir, will you cease?"

"I, never! I love you, Thisbe; and I will fondly breathe it out to you, the air, to all the earth; yea, to high heaven, to cherubim and seraphim, and back again to you. I love you, Thisbe!"

"You do not, Sir; or, if you do, you ought not. You have a wife."

"Before men's eyes, not Heaven's."

"Before men's and Heaven's, Sir."

"No."

"Yes, Sir; believe it."

"I say no, Thisbe. What's a wife, if the heart is not with her?"

"What is a word that is not kept, Sir? You once swore you loved her."

"I was young, rash, thoughtless!"

"But you loved her once, Sir. Confess it."

"Only with the passion of hot-blooded youth."

"But you called it love, invited Heaven and earth to witness that it was."

"I thought it was."

"You thought right, Sir. It was love. For it is love when the pining heart doth to another go out in delicious warmth and hope and joy."

"So mine goes out to you, Thisbe."

"We are speaking of your love for the Queen, Sir."

"My love for her—a thing of the past."

"A thing of the present and of the future, Sir."

"Thisbe, you will drive me mad! I love you, only you!"

"You ought not, Sir; must not!"

"I ought and will."

"Do not say so, Sir. I never can be yours. Of what avail, then, is your love?"

"Do you not love me, Thisbe?"

"Say I did, Sir. What then?"

"Why, then, you will be mine!"

"Never, Sir! I will not so wrong the Queen. I will not so wrong you, Sir. I will not so wrong mine own maiden-fame."

"Who is speaking of wrong? It is of love—the love of an unhappy King for the loveliest fair one on whom the sun doth shine. It is no sin to love."

"Why will you pursue this theme, Sir?"

"Why do we speak of what is chiefest in our hearts?"

"Sir, I can never be yours."

"You can and will!"

"Never, Sir!"

"Do you not love me, Thisbe?"

"I do."

"Bravely said, girl. I knew you did. My heart told me so, and it never yet told me falsely. Come, sweet, be mine."

"Sir, I pray you take your hand from around my waist."

"Rather will I clasp it closer. It is mine, Thisbe; love gives it me: and every man may do what he will with his arm."

"Sir, take away your hand, I entreat—I command you!"

"Command! There, see how I obey you! Only true love does that! Have pity on me, Thisbe!"

"I must have pity on the Queen, on myself, Sir."

"You do not love me, Thisbe, or you would never thus hold me off. Oh, Thisbe, show your love for your unhappy Francis, or never again say you love him! What is true love if it be not true?"

"Sir, is this kind?"

"What?"

"Thus to persuade me to make shipwreck of all a true woman holds dear—her honor."

"What is honor where love is?"

"What is love without honor?"

"Love talks of love only, not honor."

"Love can only talk of love in honor. For love is only love when in its integrity, and what is that but honor?"

"In your eye is love, on your lips coldness!"

"The colder the lips, the warmer the heart, Sir."

"You have no heart, Thisbe. For hearts have pity, and you have none."

"My heart is in your honor, Sir, the Queen's, mine own. Oh, Sir, why will you talk thus? It is unkind!"

"Unkind to tell I love you, Thisbe?"

"Prove it, Sir."

"Willingly. How?"

"By kindness."

"What is kindness if it be not love?"

"Yes, real love."

"What is real love?"

"That which does not wound."

"And do I, Thisbe?"

"When you do press what I wish not to hear—yes."

"Now, 'tis you are cruel, Thisbe. For when the heart is full, to bid it not to speak, is to bid it die."

"I believe you love me, Sir."

"I do, Thisbe."

"And I confess that I love you, Sire. But only in honor."

"That love is in honor, Thisbe, which is true; and I will be true to you. Be mine!"

"Take away your hand, Sire."

"Oh, Thisbe, have pity."

"Take away your hand, Sire, or I will call for help."

"There! You see how I obey. Is not that well? You coldly call me Sire, when I am only Francis. Call me Francis."

"I will, Sire, on one condition."

"Name it."

"That you do three innocent persons right, Sire."

"Gladly, sweet. Their names?"

"You must not call me sweet, Sire."

"I must and will, Thisbe; for you are so to me."

"Call me by my name, Sire, or farewell!"

"Stay, Thisbe!"

"That is right, Sire. Call me that, and we shall still be friends. Forget it, and I must take my errand, leaving my errand unperformed."

"Name it, Thisbe."

"To entreat your Majesty to do three innocent persons right."

"Their names?"

"Her Majesty—whom you have pained, Sire, by dismissing her only confidant and true female friend; Mademoiselle de Bowmanville—who is now weeping over separation from her rash mistress; Louis de Lemonnier—than whom a nobler or more gallant gentleman never set foot in your palace, Sire."

"The Queen's Musketeer, Mademoiselle de Bowmanville—traitors!"

"No traitors, Sire. On my life, no traitors; but loyal, Sire—loyal as any hearts in France!"

"You do not know them, Thisbe. But for them, you might be my Queen in fact, as you are already of my heart."

"I do know them, Sire, for as two brave devoted hearts as ever stood faithfully by a periled and unhappy mistress."

"But you know not all, Thisbe!"

"What is the all, Sire?"

"I had resolved upon divorce, that you might be my Queen."

"I wish not to be Queen, Sire."

"I had resolved, I say, upon a divorce, with intent to raise you to my state and throne, which fact, the cunning jade—"

"Mademoiselle de Bowmanville is no cunning jade, Sire."

"Tut, tut. Listen to me, Thisbe!"

"So long as your Majesty does no wrong to Mademoiselle de Bowmanville, Sire!"

"On learning which fact, Mademoiselle de Bowmanville (though how she discovered it, save by prying means, I know not)—"

"'Twas known to all the court—'twas common gossip, Sire!"

"How?"

"The Count de Bounier and your Majesty's minister have each a mistress, and your plan was scarce conceived ere it was known to all the court. Hence, there was no need of prying, Sire!"

"How learned you this, Thisbe? You, who live not at court?"

"I may not tell you, Sire; at least, not now. I pray you, on with your story."

"On learning the fact of my intention to apply for a divorce, the scheming Adrienne plotted with her mistress to defeat it."

"And so she ought and did, Sire—your Majesty sees I know all, and, therefore, you need not go on. Mademoiselle de Bowmanville was right, in making a noble struggle for her royal mistress, whose peace and happiness were threatened; her mistress had a right to struggle for herself; and her Musketeer, as a loyal gentleman, to make a gallant effort for his Queen. Be just, Sire!"

"Against his King?"

"For his Queen and employer, Sire."

"The Queen? My foe!"

"Her Majesty loves you, Sire, as tenderly as did ever wife her lord. Be just, Sire!"

"Let us talk of ourselves, Thisbe—of our love!"

"No, Sire; of those for whom I came to plead?"

"You were sent—and by those who knew your hold on me?"

"I came of my own impulse, Sire. I was not sent. Nor did any know of my design."

"Call me Francis, not 'Sire', and you shall have your wish!"

"When your Majesty shall have restored Mademoiselle de Bowmanville to her mistress, and the Musketeer to freedom, Sire!"

"You are exacting, Thisbe. But be it as you will! What ho without, there!"

A page came hurrying in.

"Call the Count de Bounier. Count," added the monarch, when the latter entered; "I have changed my mind. Write an order to the keeper of the fortress to restore the Musketeer to freedom."

"Very well, Sire," said De Bounier, his cheeks turning livid. "Sit down and write it at once, Count," continued the King. "After all, Count, the immuring him in a dungeon, on so slight grounds, was a hasty act, and justice should be as prompt! That will pay him for communicating my affairs to his mistress!" added the monarch, to himself.

"Your Majesty is the judge!" said De Bounier, who was evidently out of humor.

"Right, Count," smiled the King, only rejoicing at his discomfiture. "Dispatch the order!"

"It is ready for your Majesty's signature," said the Count, who had seated himself at the royal writing-desk.

"Now, another, Count; revoke the order for Mademoiselle de Bowmanville's dismissal," pursued the monarch.

De Bounier's gray eyes, turned upon the paper before him, emitted lightnings.

"Both are ready, your Majesty," he said, coldly, an instant later.

"See that they are immediately attended to," said Francis, waving him from the cabinet.

"Eternal furies!" muttered the Count, on his way to the anteroom. "This is the gipsy's work. But I will not be wholly thwarted. The orders shall remain in my pocket till morning. The insolent Musketeer shall taste the sweets of at least one night of imprisonment; and Adrienne, whom may fate smite down to endless sleep! the horrors of a whole night of uncertainty. His Majesty will never learn the fact; and I shall have the satisfaction of having made the Norman, Adrienne, and the Queen, drain at least one draught of the hyssop of my hate!"

"You see how I obey you, Thisbe!" said the monarch. "I yield everything to your desire! Will you not now have pity on me?"

"I will say this, Francis," said the gipsy, pale with emotion, but firm; "I love you!"

"And will be mine?"

"In heart ever—yes; in person—no! And having said this much, Sire, I pray your Majesty to let me go!"

"But you will come back, Thisbe?" cried the King, taking her hand and looking tenderly in her eyes.

"No, Sire."

"Thisbe!"

"It must be so, Sire," said the maiden, with a trembling lip and a swelling breast.

"My heart goes out to you, and I must go to where I may not see you nor hear your voice. (In a weak voice, her cheek pale, and her hand cold), I pray you, Sire, let go my hand, and withdraw your eye from mine. I am a woman, Sire, and—weak!"

"I call you, Thisbe, and you me, Sire!" said the monarch, in reproach.

"Take away your hand, and withdraw your eye, Francis!"

"Say you love me, Thisbe."

"I do."

"Say you will come again, or write me where I may go to you!"

"No!"

"O Thisbe! idol of my hopes and dreams, have pity! Cut me not off. Let me at least see you, from time to time."

"Sire, be a gentleman; ask me not. I have no treasure but my honor. Like you, I dream of heaven; and when, life's trial over, I ascend to judgment, I would appear before my Maker without terror and without shame!"

"Go, then, Thisbe. I love you; but I am not a villain. Yet (faltering, and with an appealing look) you will come back again!"

"Sire, I am a woman. I love you, but in mercy, do not tempt me!"

"I will not, Thisbe. Your hand, at parting."

"There!"

"One kiss, Thisbe—the first, the last!"

Thisbe, drawing back, her cheek pale, her voice quivering, and her hand cold as marble, exclaimed:

"Sire—Francis—let my love be holy!"

The King, struggling with himself and conquering with a brave effort of his will, "I will, Thisbe. Remember me. Farewell!"

"Farewell," rejoined Thisbe, retiring with a step trembling in spite of herself.

The King, bursting into tears, and throwing himself on a chair, exclaimed:

"My heart is broken! God help me!"

CHAPTER XXI.

The next morning, all Paris was in commotion. Men looked at one another in surprise. An extraordinary event had occurred the night before, and all classes wondered if it was the beginning or the end of some rebellious scheme.

The excitement extended to the palace, where, when the monarch arose, he found every face pale with uneasiness.

"How now?" he demanded, of the gentleman in waiting. "What means your blanched cheeks? And you, Sir, to the keeper of the fortress, why are you not at your post?"

"Sire, I have no post," replied the keeper; the fortress no longer exists, save as a heap of ruins!"

"What, Sir?" said Francis. "Are you mad?"

"It is as I have had the honor to tell your Majesty. Last night, at twelve, the fortress was suddenly surrounded by an unconquerable horde of gipsies, who commenced, all at one moment, some with a huge log to force the main gate, others, with similar means, to batter in the smaller entrances, and the greater number with poles and ladders to scale on all sides the walls, which, if your Majesty will remember, were defended with cannon only in front."

"No comments, Sir," said Francis, sharply. "The facts!"

"The attack was so sudden, and conducted with such silence, Sire, that the first intimation I had of it was the loud, simultaneous booming of the logs against the gates."

"Where were your sentries, Sir?" petulantly demanded the monarch. "My fortress surprised and stormed by a gang of gipsies. Eternal blight upon them. Where were your sentries, Sir?"

"On duty, as became them," said the keeper, respectfully, but with firmness. "But the night was dark as blackness, and the gipsies, as was afterward discovered, had approached with naked feet, to prevent alarm. On hearing the attack, Sire, I instantly ordered every man of the gipsy under my command to the guns; but, unfortunately, the besiegers had taken their precautions, and were directly under the walls, so that the cannon, designed for a foe squarely in front, could not be brought to bear upon them."

"But you had muskets!"

"I had, Sire, and used them; in the midst of which, the gipsies, who had swarmed in upon us through the doors, which they had forced, the embrasures through which they had crept, and over the walls which they had scaled, thronged around and fell upon us like a legion of devils, and, in an instant, my men and myself were thrown down, tied hand and foot, dragged into the square facing the fortress, where my men were flung down like so many logs, and myself at the foot of the gipsy leader, who sternly demanded the keys to the cells. I refused. He drew a knife, and put it threateningly across my throat. I still refused, determined to die, rather than submit! The chief looked at me sternly a moment; and then, putting up the knife, made a sign to his men, two of whom instantly dexterously ripped up my garments, leaving me the next moment as nude as when I was born. They searched my girdle, my pockets, my boots, but without finding the keys, which, according to custom, I had, three hours before, after seeing that every prisoner was safe, deposited in a secret place, known only to myself, in the wall of my chamber. On discovering that the keys were not with me, the chief, placing the knife against my throat, demanded their whereabouts, or my life. I refused and defied him; upon which, he, with a fierce imprecation, withdrew the knife, with his fist smote me a rude blow upon the cheek, and darted toward the fortress, doubtless to use his own skill in searching for the keys. But he had scarcely gone," pursued the keeper, when I heard the heavy tramping of a second and larger body of men, who almost immediately passed in silence to the fortress. Who they were, I knew not, as I could only see the shadowy outline of their

forms in the gloom. Tied hand and foot, I could not stir, but this only rendered my sense of hearing the keener. In a few minutes, I caught a low, confused murmur of voices, and I presently made out that the two parties were bent upon the same object, and had, without knowing it, planned the attack for the same hour. Presently, there was a general cry of rage; the keys could not be found, and the cry went up, 'Raze the fortress to the ground!' No sooner said than done. In another moment, I heard great logs booming against the inner walls, then against the outer, and, by-and-by, crash after crash—the walls were falling in!"

"But these men had an object?" said the King.

"Yes, Sire. But, as yet, I had not known its character. I was not, however, to remain ignorant of it. In about an hour, as I judge, when of the fortress scarcely one stone or beam remained upon another, there went up a great shout of, 'The Norman, the Norman! we have him! he is free!'"

"The Norman!" cried the monarch, starting. "The Queen's Musketeer?"

"The same, Sire!"

Francis reflected a moment.

"He had been still a prisoner, then?"

"Yes, Sire."

"Go on, Sir," said the monarch, his brow darkening.

"My story is done, Sire."

"Tis well," said Francis. "Have you discovered who led the second body of men?"

"No, Sire. I have made every inquiry, but without obtaining a clue."

"Who waits there?" cried the King, stamping his foot.

A page entered.

"Call the Count de Bounier."

"The Count is ill, Sire."

"He was well last night."

"He rose in good health, Sire; but, on his way to pay his respects to your Majesty, he was attacked by a vertigo, and had to be taken home by his attendants."

"Is this true?" demanded Francis, suspiciously.

"I can certify to it, your Majesty," said the Lord with whom Louis had fought. "The Count had come up with me on my way to the palace, and it was in the midst of my narration to him of the affair of the fortress that he was attacked as the page has described."

"Had the Count not heard of the event before?"

"No, Sire."

"Umph!" muttered the monarch. "I think I understand the nature of his vertigo." Then, turning to the page, "Call the Captain of my Guards."

"Your Majesty's commands?" said the Captain, in a few moments.

"Know you the lodgings of Monsieur De Lemmonier?"

"Yes, Sire."

"Arrest and put him in the Conciergerie. Dispatch!"

To the page:

"To her Majesty; inquire the address of Mademoiselle de Bowmanville, whom see, and bid her return to her duty to her mistress."

To the Lord who had fought with Louis:

"Marquis, go and see the Count, and bid him to our presence immediately."

Twenty minutes afterward, the three returned, almost simultaneously.

"Well, Marquis?"

"The Count had gone out, your Majesty."

"Where?"

"I could not learn, Sire. He had left, with a few attendants, on horseback."

"Tis well. What news?" to the Captain.

"Monsieur De Lemmonier is not at his lodgings, your Majesty. He had left about an hour before my arrival."

"On foot?"

"No, Sire; on horseback, as if on business."

"Umph! The coincidence means something. I fear me mischief is brewing. Well, Sir?" to the page.

"Mademoiselle De Bowmanville, who had been staying with a friend, a linen-draper, in the market-place, left Paris about two hours ago, Sire."

"Tis well," said Francis, dismissing him.

"There's a knot in this," he murmured, to himself, with a darkening brow, "and I scent blood."

CHAPTER XXII.

And now let us see what took the Count de Bounier, the Musketeer, and Mademoiselle de Bowmanville out of the city so very suddenly.

On rising, De Bounier, while undergoing his toilet at the hands of his valet, mentally felicitated himself upon his temporary triumph over the Queen, whom he hated, the Norman, whom he viewed with green-eyed envy, and the Queen's confidant, whom he likewise regarded with malignity, because she had been the originator of the plot which had baffled his mission to Rome; and more than all, because, as his keen eyes and wits assured him, she loved and was beloved by the man he could not think upon without rancor.

When about to descend to breakfast, he took from his pocket the order for the Norman's release, and handing it to his valet, said:

"This to the keeper of the fortress, and tell him I ought to have sent it last evening, but it escaped my memory."

"But, my Lord," said the valet, designing to tell him of the destruction of the fortress, "I—"

"No words, Sirrah!" interrupted his master. "I am in no humor for your impertinence. Do as I bid you!"

And, therefore, the Count, who was an imperious lord of his own household, heard nothing of the event which affected himself so deeply, till on his way to the palace, as already recounted, where he designed to send by a page to the Queen the revocation of Adrienne's dismissal.

The news of the destruction of the fortress by the gipsies and their unknown helpers, and the liberation of the Norman, startled him and caused the proud blood to fly from his cheeks with the suddenness of lightning.

He saw his blunder in an instant, and also the policy of absenting himself for a few days, to give the King's wrath on the discovery of his perfidy, time to cool, when, fully sensible of his influence over the monarch, he did not doubt he should be able successfully to appease him.

"Marquis," he said, to the Lord, giving him the order for the revocation of Adrienne's dismissal, "do me the favor, on your arrival at the palace, of sending this in to her Majesty. I regret to put you to so much trouble, but my vertigo—"

"No trouble at all, Count. Shall I give you my arm back to your hotel?"

"No. My followers will see to me. Now," he added, to himself, "for my country-seat at Meaux till this affair blows over."

Fifteen minutes later, with a few armed attendants, for traveling was not the safest in those days, he was in the saddle, and spurring hard from Paris.

His country-seat was three-days' journey from the metropolis; but at the rate at which he was speeding, he was likely to make it in one-half that time.

Very early the same morning, that is, about seven o'clock, a messenger from the country, who had driven hard, alighted at the door of the linen-draper in the market-place, where he designed to stay only long enough to communicate certain tidings to the latter, who was from the same village, where he intended to proceed to the palace and inform Adrienne, who was also from the same locality, of the severe illness of a near relative, who, in anticipation of a fatal termination, desired immediately to see her.

As we already know, the messenger, to find Adrienne, had no need to proceed farther than the linen-draper's.

On learning the dangerous state of her kinswoman, Adrienne hastily indited a note to Louis, congratulating him upon his freedom, and informing him of her sudden summons home, and then mounting a horse procured for her by her friend the linen-draper, set out without delay with the messenger.

The note was sent to Louis about an hour after her departure, when, comprehending the danger of the road to a lady without a sufficient escort, and telling tall Jacques of his purpose, he at once ordered his Arabian, hastened to the linen-draper's to learn the exact route Adrienne had taken, and then giving free rein to his steed, shortly came up with her.

In fact, love's instinct had told the Queen's favorite he would follow, and, though sincerely anxious to reach La Forte, her native village, as soon as possible, yet a some-

thing—need we say what?—prompted her not to put her steed to its utmost speed, and caused her, every now and then, to look back—perhaps to see how far she had gotten on her way!

Now Meaux, the destination of De Bounier, and La Forte, lay in the same direction, and in distance only a few hours apart.

About noon, De Bounier, followed close by his attendants, came sufficiently up with the Queen's favorite, her Musketeer and the messenger, to recognize them from behind, when, not desiring to be recognized in return, he allowed his horse to fall off into a slower gait, and finally turned off into a cross-lane, to a lower road, along which he drove at full trot for several miles, when, again turning, he made his way back to the highroad and came out several hundred yards ahead of them, upon which, spurring up to increase the distance between them and himself, he, in half an hour, had left them far behind.

It will be remembered that, in the journey to Rome, Louis himself had performed a similar movement. That had a meaning, so had this.

On the evening of the second day, the Musketeer, having seen Adrienne to her father's chateau, and spent an hour with her family, who, thanks to her own letters and those of the linen-draper, were no strangers to his worth, privately imprinted a love-kiss on her lips, and, resisting all importunities on the part of her relatives to tarry till morning, vaulted once more into the saddle, notwithstanding the lateness of the hour, returned to Paris.

He had, however, this in his favor, that it was a bright, clear, moonlight, which, with the white, chalky road, rendered objects on all sides almost as distinct as at noonday.

It was about seven o'clock when he left La Forte. At midnight he was within a few hundred yards of Meaux, which lay a little off from the road, which was lined on each side with a noble row of titanic oaks, the growth of generations.

As he approached abreast of the village, he fancied he beheld the glitter of a sword-hilt behind a tree on the left; whereupon, he slung round his belt, so as to have his Venice ready to his hand, and brought forward his thoughts to be prepared for a surprise.

A few moments, and he was within ten paces of the main road or street to the village, which lay to the left in the silent moonlight like an unsuspecting dreamer in tranquil repose.

Suddenly, he heard the click of a pistol behind him. Turning, he beheld a burly man, in the garb of a peasant, scarcely five yards distant, in the act of covering him with a musketoon.

Quick as thought, he whipped out his Venetian blade, and starting his horse to the left, bent his head to a level with the Arabian's mane.

He was not a whit too soon.

His cheek had barely touched his horse's neck, when a bullet, hissing, grazed the top edge of his slouched hat, and buried itself in a tree.

In an instant, he was again erect in his saddle, and darting toward the stalwart miscreant, whom he, the next moment, clove in twain down to the shoulder.

As he relifted his reeking blade, the top of his hat-feather fell softly upon his breast, and the next instant he heard behind a sharp report. Wheeling in the direction of the sound, he was almost in a moment half-startled by a blinding flash from a gun at the shoulder of a second ruffian within a few paces of him in the road.

At the same instant, he felt a hot rift on the upper edge of his left shoulder, near the neck.

Sweeping forward on his Arabian, he came up in a trice with the cowardly wretch, who was making for safety behind the trees, when bringing his faithful Venice down aslant, he sent him sinking to the earth, half drenched with blood from a great gash in his neck that had nearly severed his head from his body.

At the same moment he descried, two trees off, a man in a black mask, taking aim at him with a pistol, which presently flashed, when he felt his hat glide from his head.

Plunging forward, with uplifted sword, and shouting:

"Come out, assassin, and bear yourself before me, face to face, like a man," he aimed a blow at the mask, in the shadow of the tree,

who, evading it, darted forward into the road, when, giving a significant whistle, he drew his sword, and shouting:

"Dead men tell no tales—cut him down on your lives!" precipitated himself forward on the Arabian, which, with one hand, he seized by the bridle, but only the next moment to find himself shaken off to the ground, and feeling himself trampled by the animal's hoofs in the dust.

Nevertheless, the excitement of the moment lent him energy, and he was again promptly on his feet, and, urging half a score of miscreants, variously armed with swords and clubs, surrounding but hesitating to attack the Musketeer, whose redoubtable blade—fit present from a king—had already made short work with two of their number, not including the two just slain, and whose souls were even then far away from the scene of conflict!

Thus encouraged and overawed into courage, the ruffians pressed forward on all sides upon the Norman, who, however, springing his horse around, caused them precipitately to fall back, when, taking advantage of their confusion, he pursued the nearest three into a bush, near the roadside, where, dexterously bringing his weapon down with a sweep, and hastily following it up with a succession of blows, he was promptly rid of three foes the less, who went down upon one another, the one with a surprised groan, the second with a low moan, and the third without so much as a sign.

But the remaining seven, together with their leader, were quickly upon him; and as he wheeled, a blow of a heavy club from behind nearly unhorsed him. But retaining, by a powerful effort of will, his presence of mind, he spurred forward toward the mask, who, however, did not shrink, but put up his sword to guard the blow, which he did with a skill that proved him no inferior enemy.

The next moment, Louis received a blinding blow from a club on the side of his head, and felt himself at the same time in the act of being dragged by a pair of strong arms from his horse.

Quick as thought, he gave a wriggling spring, brought his Venice up and down with an instantaneous sweep at an object before him, which immediately sank, with a groan of mixed astonishment and rage, as if struck down by a thunderbolt.

It was the man who had pulled him from his horse.

But it was a moment to do, not think, and the Musketeer's good Venetian steel was playing around him like lightning, and doing as good work as ever did blade in conflict.

A few moments, and the assassins were reduced to five, including their leader, who, though evidently a good swordsman, was yet unable to get home a blow, notwithstanding the support of two of his companions, who alone of their comrades had the courage closely to approach the gallant Musketeer, who, thanks to his excitement and to the hardy Norman training of his native woods and hills, while chiefly defending himself from the leader, stood up under the shower of their clubs as though they were only from so many reeds. Still, this could only endure for a time.

But every sweep of his sword was also with effect; and ere many movements one of the miscreants fell back reeling, and losing his balance, sank to the earth with a gulp, and with the red tide of his life flowing out from his left temple, which the Norman's blade had laid open like a cleft.

"Upon him—down with him on your lives!" cried the leader, furiously, to the two hanging back.

The next moment, Louis felt a crushing blow on the head from behind; he staggered, brought up his weapon in a last desperate effort at the chief before him, when a second blow came down upon him with a thudding sound; consciousness left him, and he sank to the earth a bruised and bleeding mass.

"Is he dead?" demanded the mask.

"There's no knowing," said one of the remaining four, shaking his head.

"To the river with him; toss him in, and make sure," continued the leader. "There's for your pains."

And throwing down a well-filled purse, he departed, with a proud step, toward the village.

CHAPTER XXIII.

When, the next morning, tall Jacques awoke and went out, he found the Arabian standing at the door without its rider.

The moment the animal perceived him, it tossed its head with an air of satisfaction, started off a little way, and then stopping, turned to see if he was following.

As he was not, but, on the contrary, stood staring at it in surprise, it came back, looked at him a moment as if he wanted to speak, again moved off a short distance, and then turned as before too see if he followed; when, finding that he did not, it again returned, and, closely approaching, gently pulled him with its mouth by the skirt of his uniform, till it saw by his features that he understood it, when it released him, and stepping off a few paces waited for him to decide what he should do.

"Something has befallen Louis," muttered the young man, uneasily. "Wait!" he said to the horse, sensible that it understood him.

Then darting first to the stable, next to the linen-draper's, then to the palace, and satisfying himself that Louis had not returned, he buckled on his sword, put a couple of pistols in his belt, slung his musket at his back, informed his father and the linen-draper of his errand, mounted his own horse, and then returned to the Arabian, whose eyes sparkled as he approached, when bidding it, with a gesture, to lead the way, set off, at a sharp canter, after the intelligent Arabian, which, turning every now and then to see if he was following, ran before him toward the suburbs, greatly to the surprise of spectators, who had never before witnessed a like sight.

In the meanwhile the King, not having seen or heard of the palmist for two whole days and nights, was once more in the glooms.

De Bounier's disappearance, too, annoyed him. He had already forgotten and forgiven the Count's agency in the destruction of the fortress, and wished him to ferret out the whereabouts of the gipsy, whom the monarch felt that he must see again, or die.

He looked during the day at every newcomer, in hope of seeing De Bounier or the palmist; but night coming without bringing intelligence of either, he in the evening disguised himself as a craftsman, and, with a knife in his girdle and a pistol in his breast, sauntered alone to the gipsy quarter.

Here, however, all was dark and silent. The quarter itself seemed deserted. Not a human being was visible; not a window sent forth light. It was like walking through a city depopulated by a pestilence.

Francis knocked at the house of the palmist, but there was no response; then at several others with no better success, when, giving it up in despair, he returned to the palace, muttering:

"Thisbe has departed with her friends to avoid my importunities. She never loved me!"

As he neared the private door in the rear, he perceived a personage, in the wild costume of a gipsy, leaning against a tree, and eyeing him sullenly.

It was the Chief.

As he drew nearer, the man approached him, and clutching him by the shoulder, demanded, in a voice hoarse with passion:

"Where is she? What have you done with her? Speak!"

"More civility, fellow," returned the monarch, shaking him off, with a light spring, "or I will do you the honor to take away your liberty."

"Where is she!" repeated the gipsy, his eye frenzied with excitement. "Answer!"

And he laid his hand upon the handle of a knife in his girdle.

Francis quietly drew a pistol and cocked it.

"Now, fellow," he observed, "if you wish to converse with me, take your hand off that knife, or I will shoot you down like a dog!"

"Where is she?" reiterated the Chief, withdrawing his hand, but speaking with firmness. "What have you done with her?"

"She! Whom?"

"Thisbe!" returned the gipsy, in agitation.

"Rather, what have you done with her, Sirrah?" said Francis, sharply. "I have just come from your quarter, whither I had gone in hope of finding her. Where is she?"

"You know nothing of her, then?" said

the Chief, looking at him as if to read him to the soul.

"I have asked that question of you!"

"'Tis well," said the gipsy, in mingled perplexity and pain. "Adieu!"

"'Tis not well!" cried Francis, intercepting him with the pistol. "Not a step till you have told me of her whereabouts. Where is she? Speak!"

"I know nothing of her," answered the Chief. "I have not seen or heard of her for five-and-forty days."

"Are you sincere?"

"I am."

"'Tis well," said Francis, after eyeing him a few moments. "Go, Sir! Not seen her for five-and-forty days!" he muttered to himself, uneasily, as the gipsy departed. "Where then had she been till she came to me? Where is she now?"

On entering the palace, the monarch threw himself on a lounge, dreamily, murmuring:

"It is singular. But I think I have heard the tones of that voice before. When, how, or where, I cannot fix; but they sounded to me like old familiar acquaintance, and seemed to carry me back to childhood. But, pshaw! it must have been fancy merely. What could there be in common between this dusky-skinned wanderer and Francis the First? And yet," he continued, uneasily, after a few moments, "I cannot rid me of the thought. The tones were familiar! I must see the fellow again!"

With this reflection, he called his gentlemen to unrobe him, and retired; but not to sleep. The memory of the gipsy's voice haunted him like a persistent and unwelcome visitant, and he had no help for it but to get up again and pace the chamber.

"I must fix the voice, or lie awake till daylight," he muttered, impatiently. What were the leading events in my childhood, for it was that it brought up. Let me see.

"I was then the Count of Angoulême, and my residence at my father's chateau at Epernay, which seemed to rise again before me when the gipsy spoke.

"At five years of age, wandering one day on the banks of the Marne, with my tutor, from whom I had strayed, in trying, unobserved by him, to pluck a flower from a bush in the cleft of a sloping rock, I lost my footing, fell into the river, and would have been drowned but for the noise of the splash, which alarmed my tutor, who plunged in and brought me safe to shore. That does not bring up the voice!

"At seven, I one day drew my toy sword against a gardener for daring to forbid me to cut down a small choice ebony-tree, imported from Barbary. Nor that! I am still as far off as ever?

"At eight and a half, wandering one day in the orangery, with my sister, then only two years old, of whom I was very fond, I inadvertently picked and gave her an orange yet unripe, and was thereby the innocent means of an illness which finally terminated in removing her from earth to heaven. Ha! a glimmer of the voice at last! But where—to whom did it belong?

"My sister's malady, lasting in all six months, apparently disappeared at the end of a few days, leaving her weak and convalescent, when I, in the fourth week incautiously entered her presence with a fresh orange, at sight of which she swooned and again fell ill, for months baffling the skill of all practitioners, till one day came along a young, handsome, swart-skinned traveler—a Venetian poor as a scribe, but brave and proud as Lucifer, who, professing to a rare knowledge of simples, solicited the privilege of raising my sister up.

"All others having failed, his voluntary aid was accepted, when, with a few herbs, culled in the forest wild, he made a drink which, like magic, stayed the hand of death, and in three days set the little patient on her feet. Ha! the voice at last!

"All went well for a brief season. The swart Venetian was all the rage. All the fair of Epernay were wild after the handsome dog, whom, on pretence of this malady and that, they ran after every day, till what with gold and jewels, his coffers, empty before as the boxes of a starved apothecary, were full to repletion.

"His haughtiness, too, strong enough by nature, in all conscience, increased with his fame and gains, till it was wondered, in the chateau at least, whether it would not choke him.

"One day, a careless word, repeated soon as uttered, upon his original poverty and pride, by my father, brought from his dark eyes a glance like a flash from a thunder-cloud.

"He said, nothing, however, checking with a fierce effort the quick reply that had risen to his lips, but quitted the chateau.

"The next day, my sister's malady, which had been thought to have forever left her, again returned, brought on by the sight of a second orange.

"No other aid could compare with the swart Venetian's, and he was again sent for, coming much against his will. He brought her up once more, however, and all was well again; when, one day, while walking with her nurse, in the garden, she suddenly swooned, and sank with a faint sigh to the earth.

"She was borne into the chateau, but never woke nor spoke again—lying on her little bed as if in gentle slumber, but nevertheless, breathing not.

"The Venetian, interrupted in the midst of preparations for leaving the town, was called; but after gazing at her a few moments, he gravely shook his head, pronounced her beyond his help, and retired.

"She was buried on the third day, in the family-vault, to which was also borne, nine months later, my only brother, when it was by chance discovered that my sister's corpse had been pilfered from the coffin, and, as careful investigation proved, it had not yielded to the process of decay; but how or by whom never transpired, though every means and high reward were employed to trace the villain, whose end, had he been found, would have been a warning to like miscreants through all ages.

"And therefore, gipsy-chief, Venetian, skillful culler of simples," concluded the monarch, now tranquilized, "you and I shall have another talk to-morrow!"

The next Monday, however, the gipsy, who had the day before with his tribe removed to the suburbs, to be in readiness, on reobtaining possession of the palmist, to retire altogether, to avoid all further danger to her from the King, was not to be found.

But Francis, who was not to be baffled, dispatched after him a troop of horse, with orders to scour the country in pursuit, and not to return without his capture.

The Chief himself, however, anticipating this, had sent off the band, in small parties, by different routes, to Savoy, where they were to remeet, and thence proceed by easy stages to Sardinia, himself meanwhile staying behind in disguise, to explore such localities as he deemed it possible the palmist might have fled to.

Nevertheless, several days went by without bringing to the King tidings of De Bounier or the gipsy, or to the Queen word of her Musketeer. In the meanwhile, her Majesty had sent a message to her favorite, informing her of the revocation of her dismissal, and requesting her return.

Adrienne, the condition of whose relative had in the interval changed for the better, promptly complied; but with a pale cheek and a trembled step.

"You, too are ill, child!" said the Queen, with solicitude.

"My Louis, your Majesty!" cried Adrienne, with emotion.

"True, my dear; but courage. Louis is brave, and even if he has fallen into the hands of enemies, he has a valiant friend in Jacques Fromage, who will not rest till he has discovered and set him free. Besides, child, do you not remember the palmist's prediction, that he would get into difficulty, but that his friend should deliver him? And you know the gipsy is no common fate-reader. Courage. All will yet be well!"

"And with yourself, lady?" said Adrienne.

"Me?" returned the Queen, with feeling. "I, too, have been promised joy. How it can be, I see not. But Thisbe, in whose divining-gift and high honor I have a holy faith, has said it, and I am hopeful and believe.

"And therefore your Majesty is calm?"

"Because, my dear," replied the Queen, embracing her, "my suffering is undeserved, and I have caught from you and Louis the nerving trust, that in the end Right will and must prevail!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

Tall Jacques followed the Arabian to the scene of Louis's connect with the midnight

ruffians, where the gallant animal stopped and looked around uneasily for its master.

Jacques surveyed the ground for some clue to an intelligent comprehension of the parts; but all traces of the combat on the road and sidepaths had been carefully obliterated, and inquiry of the villagers afforded him no information.

As he was about to return to the road, he perceived a large villa perched on an eminence sloping off on all sides to a broad, magnificent park, bounded in the rear by a stately wood, on the left by an extensive orchard, on the right by a quadrangular graperly, and in front by a tall, green hedge.

"Whose estate is that?" he asked, of a peasant.

"The Count de Bounier's," said the man, touching his hat.

"The Count's, ah!" mused tall Jacques. "A clue, at last! Is he there now?" he continued, to the man.

"He was yesterday," was the reply.

"Thank you. It is clear enough," he added to himself. "If Louis was here attacked, it was the work of De Bounier, who hates him for his superiority as he does poison. If Louis was attacked, it was by more than one, for few men acquainted with him would dare to tackle him alone. If he was attacked, he defended himself; if he defended himself, he made short work with most of his assailants, for that's his way; if De Bounier mingled in the affray, it was not actively, or he would have got such a taste of Louis's blade as would have lasted him the little balance of his life—that is, between the dose itself and his fall to the earth, which certainly would have been his doom, but which assuredly was not; for had he been killed the village would have been in an uproar, whereas it is quiet and humdrum; hence he, for the most part or whole, kept at a respectful distance, contenting himself with giving orders to his men, who, I'll engage, needed spurring on, to assail Louis's sword, which, in his hands, has a trick of keeping enemies at a distance. The rascals were in force, too, for the Count knew him too well to attempt to slay or take him with anything short of a small army; and if they were in force, that fact fully accounts for his death or capture, and when he fell, as he did, or his horse would not have come home alone, it was, I'll be sworn, from a cowardly blow from behind, as he is or was well able to protect himself in front. That he is not a prisoner in the village is plain, as the Count's own is the only house large enough successfully to conceal him, and he would not be likely to convert it into a prison. Louis was therefore slain outright, or else removed to some out-of-the-way place, alike unknown to the villagers and everybody else but the party or parties that conveyed him there. O the power of logic! How clearly it enables one to get the right doctrine, as my father, Pierre, the waxmaker, would say!"

Tall Jacques had by this time returned to the road, that is to the scene of the late conflict, where Louis's horse attracted his attention.

The Arabian was wandering from spot to spot, pawing the ground as if to discover evidences of the fight with which to convey an idea of the facts to its master's friend, and occasionally varying its movements by looking first at the village, then up and down the road, and then in the direction opposite the village, where was seen, in the distance, a winding stream running parallel with the road, beyond the stream a deep tract of land variously cut up into smiling meadows, orchards, and heavy woods, and beyond these a mountain, also parallel with the road.

"It is wondering which way the ruffians took with the body," mentally exclaimed Jacques; "and it will hit upon it too, presently," he continued, as the gallant steed, raising its head uncertainly, snuffed the air, as if trying to scent the information it desired. "It may not be sound doctrine to say that a horse thinks and reasons, or very flattering to man, who can do no better; but if this animal isn't both thinking and reasoning now, then I'm no judge!"

The Arabian, however, unable to make out what it wished, presently drooped its head, as if in humiliation.

"It gives it up, poor thing!" muttered Jacques. "Well, I must say I didn't think that of it. I supposed it to have been of better blood!"

But honest Jacques was too fast.

The animal shortly raised itself erect, as if indignant at its own despondency, and crossing to the unfenced land or common opposite the village, commenced cropping the herbage, but evidently only the better to think; for it paused, every now and then, half raising its head, and with its eye cast absently upon the ground, in contemplation.

"I was wrong," frankly admitted the tall son of Pierre, the waxmaker. "I fancied the grass had seduced it from its duty. But while it is ruminating, I'll push on to La Forte, and see if Adrienne knows anything of what has happened. The animal will be here when I come back; for, in its present temper, I'll risk anybody taking or running away with it."

The journey to La Forte however, was fruitless; as Adrienne, whom the question, which called for an explanation, plunged into deep distress, could only tell him of what we are already aware.

Jacques returned with a gloomy brow. But it was to find a peasant groaning on the ground, and surrounded by a crowd of commiserating idlers.

Seeing the horse browsing and without a rider, he had endeavored to capture it as a rich prize, but had calculated without his host; for, as he approached, the proud Arabian, probably suspecting his intention, had, with his heels, landed him with a tremendous kick on the grass, where, writhing with pain, his loud cries soon brought a number of persons from the village, who, however, could render him no other assistance than one to run for a priest, another for the village-doctor, who, unfortunately, had gone, half an hour before, on a professional call to La Forte, and the remainder to give the hapless wretch their sympathy.

"Oh, where is the priest—where the doctor?" he cried, pale and in terrible suffering. "Will no one call them; no one help me? I am dying!"

"Let me approach him," said Jacques, leaping from his horse. "Gentlemen, stand back, the injured man wants air."

The idlers took the hint, glad of an excuse to get away, many departing altogether.

"Courage, friend," said Jacques, gently lifting the man's head, and placing his own hat under it for a pillow. "Where are you hurt?"

"In the abdomen," returned the unfortunate wretch. "Oh, a priest, a priest, for the love of heaven. I am dying!"

"Patience, my friend, he will be here anon," said Jacques.

"Oh, it is just—just!" groaned the man. "It is Heaven's vengeance for my crime!"

"What crime?" asked Jacques. "If you have anything on your conscience, speak out. You know it is a rule of Holy Church that, in a case of extremity, if no priest is at hand, any good believer may administer absolution. And it is a good doctrine, too."

"Are you the priest?" demanded the man, faintly, who had not heard him.

"Speak, my son," said Jacques, perceiving that he was dying. "I am waiting to absolve you. There is no lie in that, for I am," he added, mentally, to himself, "though whether it will do him any good is another question. But one may as well let him go off easy."

"I am so weak, holy father," said the man, with a quivering spasm. "I am dying, and have only time for what is heaviest on my soul."

"On with that," said Jacques.

The man then made a confession, which led the startled Jacques to see in the kick of the Arabian the hand of Providence.

The wretch was one of the miscreants concerned in the attack on Louis, of which he gave all the particulars, concluding with the order to throw the body of the Musketeer into the river.

"And did you?" demanded tall Jacques, eagerly.

"No," gasped the wretch, faintly. "We thought, as we had struck him down, bleeding and insensible, we had done him injury enough, and we did not want his blood against us, and then he had made such a gallant fight we hadn't to obey the order of the Count."

"The Count de Bounier?"

"The same!"

"I thought so; I was satisfied of it," muttered Jacques. "What did you do with the body?" he asked, in a low tone, of the man.

"We carried it to Epernay, where we ar-

rived only an hour before daybreak, and laid it down before the gate of the royal chateau."

"Did the heart still beat?"

"Oh, absolve me, holy father. I am dying."

"Answer me first. Did the heart still beat?"

"It did," gasped the wretch. "Absolve me!"

Jacques snatched his hat from under the man's head, sprung upon his horse, and, whistling to the Arabian, was off the next moment, like the wind, leaving the dying man waiting for his answer, and the spectators in amaze.

CHAPTER XXV

Louis, who was found at an early hour, pale, bleeding, and insensible, at the gate of the royal chateau, in Epernay, had been cared for.

He had lost much blood, and been seriously bruised, but a skillful physician, good nursing, and kindly treatment on the part of the Angouleme family, famed alike for their hospitality and noble virtues as for their high lineage, soon brought him to, and placed him once more upon his legs; to which, however, his youth and naturally hardy constitution not a little contributed.

Nevertheless, he was still pale and weak, and unable to take any exercise further than a short walk in the garden, which was extensive, tastefully arranged, and surrounded with a not very high, but stout and neat, stone wall.

Still, fearful that his enemies would attribute his absence to fear of the King's wrath at his escape from the demolished fortress, he was anxious to go on at once to Paris.

But to this his benefactors, who, with the delicate instinct of noble minds, had forborne to ask his name or business, would by no means consent; gently but firmly insisting upon his remaining till his strength had sufficiently returned, when they generously proposed to lend him their carriage to convey him to his destination, at the same time offering to send a trusty servant with any note or other communication he might desire to forward to his friends.

Louis had therefore no help for it but to submit, which he did with a good grace, conscious that he was with friends, who would not detain him an instant longer than was for his best good.

Here, to their mutual satisfaction, Jacques found him.

The meeting between the Musketeers was touching; but it was cut short by the Angoulemes, who smilingly insisted that their guest was yet too weak to bear excitement.

Jacques assented, and, thanking them for their kindness to his friend, gave a gentle pressure to Louis himself, and took his departure, promising to call again in a few days.

On his next visit, he had news, good and bad, for Louis, who appeared to have something upon his mind.

Adrienne had been restored, and sent her best regards to him.

The eyes of the invalid Musketeer sparkled. The fortress was being rebuilt.

Louis was indifferent.

De Bounier had not yet made his appearance.

"Fortunately for me," murmured Louis, "when I shall be once more in strength, Meaux is not so far from Paris but my Arabian knows the way to it."

A body of horse was in pursuit of the gipsy Chief, many of whose people had been arrested.

Louis was all attention.

The Guards, still retaining the King's order for Louis' arrest, were on the lookout for him.

"They will not have to look long, once I am in a condition to return to Paris!" he, smiling, observed, in passing.

Word had been heard of the palmist, who, at a convent a few leagues from Paris, was about to take the veil.

"Know you the name of the convent?" asked Louis, hastily.

"Yes; the House of the Sacred Heart?"

"Is it on your way to Paris?"

"Yes," replied tall Jacques, waiting for him to continue. But, as the invalid did not, he went on himself with the news.

The King had twice been to the convent, but Thisbe (fearful of herself) would not see him, on either occasion.

The invalid did not appear displeased.

The King was in the glooms, deeper than ever before.

The countenance of Louis was impassable.

The Queen was sad, but patient.

"Tell her Majesty, from me, on your return," said Louis, "to hope."

"To hope?" said Jacques, in surprise, and with an air requesting an explanation.

"To hope, my friend," said Louis, who, as he never betrayed secrets, had not informed Jacques of anything private he had learned at court, as a man or a Musketeer, and who had no intention of beginning now. "Her Majesty will understand."

"I will," said Jacques in disappointment.

"Others' secrets are not mine, Jacques," said Louis, smilingly extending his hand.

"Right doctrine!" said Jacques, his honest countenance lighting up again.

"Come," said Louis, rising slowly, for he was still weak. "But," pointing downward, "what do you see?"

"A tessellated floor."

"And there," he continued, again pointing downward, when they had reached the hall on the lower floor.

"The same."

"Before us?" he pursued, a few moments later.

"A large house in the midst of an extensive garden."

"And in the distance?" added Louis, turning and facing the gate.

"A mountain."

"Let us go into the drawing-room (pointing to a full-length portrait of the Countess of Angouleme, who had a few years before deceased). What does that represent?"

"A tall, handsome lady, of about thirty, with dark eyes."

"'Tis well, my friend," said Louis, sinking on a chair, with sudden weakness. "Your arm," he continued, presently. "Let us to the gate."

"You wish me to go," said Jacques, feeling hurt.

"You have three messages that require dispatch," said Louis, with a meaning smile.

"I should be glad of your society all day, Jacques; but we must not let the happiness of others suffer to gratify ourselves."

"But to whom are the three messages?"

"The first to her Majesty, to whom say, from me, 'Hope—the night is passing, dawn is near.' The second to Adrienne, to whom say, from me, that I grow stronger, day by day, with thinking of her. The third to the palmist, at the House of the Sacred Heart, to whom, from me, these words: 'Be not too precipitate, fair friend. I have seen, in Epernay, the portrait of a fine tall lady, with dark eyes, in a large house, with tessellated floors, in the midst of a garden luxuriant with trees, and shrubbery, and looking off upon a mountain in the distance.'"

"Farewell," said Jacques, pressing Louis' hand and springing upon his horse. His curiosity was aroused, but he had no intention of again committing himself. "Shall I stop on the way to communicate this?"

"No. First to our royal mistress, who, at your request, in my name, will give you leave to confer a few moments with Adrienne, and then bid you with all speed to the retreat of the palmist."

"Enough. Farewell." He said, and was off.

"Weak still, very weak!" murmured Louis, resting a few moments for support against the gate. "I fear me, I shall not be able to leave here for yet a month."

But the Musketeer was mistaken. He was to take his departure much sooner.

On the afternoon of the third day thereafter, as he was walking at the further end of the garden, it being a calm, quiet, and sunny day, he was startled by a rapid tramp of horse, and an irregular discharge of musketry in the distance, as if of horsemen in pursuit; anon, by the panting and the quick, heavy foot-bounds of some apparently hard-pressed fugitive; and the next instant, a man, somewhere between forty and fifty, his face pallid, his eyes glaring with excitement, and in a wild, picturesque costume, sprang, at a leap, over the garden-wall, and fell, like a wounded moose, at his feet, crying, in a hoarse voice.

"Hide me, for the love of Heaven, hide me!"

Louis recognized him in a moment. It was the gipsy Chief.

The fire of the horsemen had not been without effect. He was bleeding in three places.

"This way," said Louis, hastily, leading him into a summer-house. "First for your wounds."

"Ha! that voice!" cried the fugitive, staring at him, stupefied. "Louis De Lemmonier's!"

"The same, my friend; though somewhat fallen away, as you see—thanks to my interesting friend, the Count De Bounier, who would have killed me if he could; but as he did not, here I am, and, though an invalid, at your service."

"The hand of Heaven is in this!" exclaimed the gipsy, with a groan.

"You are wounded," said Louis taking a silken handkerchief from the pocket of his doublet, and tearing it into three strips.

"Permit me to bandage—"

"I can do it better," interrupted the Chief, seizing the strips; "though I fear it will be of no use, as I doubt not I am winged past surgery. One of the cursed bullets is in my liver, another has broken a bone, and a third barely grazed my spine."

"Let me call for help and a surgeon."

"No. It would be of no service. My time has come and I must make the best of it. What place is this?"

"The royal chateau."

"What!" cried the gipsy, starting, "the Count of Angouleme's?"

"The same."

The Chief groaned, and his face became pallid.

"Fate—fate!" he exclaimed, in bitterness.

"Where is Thisbe?" he demanded, abruptly.

"Do you know?"

"Yes."

"Are you at liberty to leave this place?"

"If I will it—yes."

"Has the King possession of Thisbe?"

"No."

"Thank Heaven! Do you still feel an interest in her?"

"I do."

"A deep interest?" said the gipsy, fixing his dark eyes upon him, as if he would read him to the soul.

"Such an interest as a gentleman may feel in a friendless and unprotected woman, with whose sufferings he sympathizes and whose honor he respects."

"Enough," said the gipsy, apparently satisfied. "Is she under your protection?"

"No; under God's. She is in a convent."

"Are you at liberty to see her?"

"I presume so. Hark!"

Voices were heard without.

"Where is he?" demanded half a dozen horsemen in a breath, from the wall, to which they had now come up.

"Who?" returned a voice, which Louis recognized as that of the gardener.

"The gipsy."

"What gipsy?"

"Did not a man scale this wall, but now?"

"I saw none," answered the gardener, a proud man.

"How long have you been here?"

"Long enough to know my duty," was the reply. "Down from the wall, Sirs. You are trespassing on the royal chateau."

The horsemen dropped as if they had been shot.

"He disappeared somewhere about here," cried one. "Come on. He cannot have gone far."

The next instant, the horses were again in motion, and the sound of their footsteps rapidly died away.

"I have something for Thisbe and the King," said the gipsy. "Will you bear it to them?"

"I will."

"Immediately?"

"Yes."

"On your honor?"

"On my word as a Norman gentleman."

"Enough," said the gipsy, who was growing every moment more and more pallid. "My time is short. Listen and bear witness."

Half an hour later, the gipsy had breathed his last; and Louis, forgetful of everything but what he had heard, was in the saddle, and driving like lightning to Paris.

Arrived in the city, he dismounted at the palace, and sprang up the staircase three steps at a time.

But, to his surprise, the palace was comparatively deserted.

"Where is his Majesty?" he demanded, hastily, of the first person he met—the Lord with whom he had fought.

"His Majesty and all the Court have gone to Vincennes, where Mademoiselle Thisbe, the palmist, takes the veil to-day."

"Thanks, my Lord."

And the Musketeer rushed to the Queen's apartments.

"Announce me to her Majesty," he said to a page.

"Pardon, Monsieur De Lemmonier," returned the latter; "but I fancy you have not heard the news."

"What news?"

"Her Majesty, together with Mademoiselle De Bowmanville and her chief maids-of-honor, unaware that his Majesty the King, who set out at seven, also designed to go, left this morning at six for the House of the Sacred Heart, at Vincennes, where a friend is to-day to take the veil."

"Thank you, friend," said Louis, turning short on his heel.

"Oh, M. De Lemmonier," continued the page, running after him.

"Well," said Louis, pausing.

"The Count De Bounier, who arrived here an hour since, on learning whither the King had gone, has also gone to Chantilly to pay his respects to his Majesty."

"Why do you tell me this," asked Louis.

"Knowing the Count to be unfriendly to you, Monsieur De Lemmonier, I thought I would put you on your guard, so that in case you should meet him, you might not be taken by surprise," said the page, who, in common with all in the Queen's suite, regarded the Musketeer with warm feelings.

"Thank you," said Louis, wringing his hand. "I shall henceforth count you among my friends."

"I ask no higher honor, Monsieur De Lemmonier," said the youth, with blushing delight.

"Farewell," said Louis, hurrying off.

On returning to the ante-room, he found a file of guards drawn up on each side the entrance, awaiting him.

"M. De Lemmonier," said an officer, holding up the order with one hand, and with the other touching him on the shoulder, "I arrest you, in the name of his Majesty!"

Louis saw in a moment his danger, but his presence of mind did not desert him.

"At your peril, Sir," he cried, pushing the officer aside.

"I am on the King's business; who lays hands on me lays hands on his Majesty!"

And, calling up all his strength, he proudly stalked away, leaving the officer stupefied and in amazement.

A few moments later, mounted on the Arabian, he was speeding from Paris like a line of light.

CHAPTER XXVI.

The large oblong chapel of the House of the Sacred Heart was thronged with a brilliant assemblage, composed for the most part of all the distinguished of the Court of France.

The auditorium was filled with the King's friends, who had come last, while the Queen and her suite, who had arrived first, were honored with a place in the choir-gallery, whence, facing the other, they could observe the ceremonies of the occasion without being incommoded, and with advantage. Jacques was in attendance on her Majesty in his capacity of Musketeer; and, standing at the head of the staircase, had the satisfaction of informing all, ladies as well as gentlemen, who sought to escape from the pressure below, that the gallery was devoted exclusively to her Majesty and suite, and that he—Jacques Fromage—was there to protect them from intrusion. Not that this was much in itself; but it was some small satisfaction to the son of Pierre, the waxmaker, who considered it good doctrine to snub, in a small way, high lords and ladies, who, at court, had affected to look down upon him.

He had delivered Louis' message to the palmist; but the latter, who, heartsick, had already had enough of the world, did not permit it to influence her from her previous resolve to place herself out of reach of the King and her own weakness by taking the veil. To accept of parents and

Frank, if such were indeed hers, was, she mentally argued, only still to render herself more liable than ever to the importunities of Francis, who, as she felt, had already too warm an advocate in her own heart.

But the chief scene was not in the chapel, but the vestry, to which the King, who would not be restrained, impetuously made his way, at the first tinkle of the bell commanding the present approach of the nuns, with the Abbess and the candidate, to the altar.

"Protect me, mother!" cried Thisbe, in a whisper of alarm, to the Abbess.

She was arrayed in white, with her luxuriant ebony tresses hanging down, and ready for the sacrifice.

"Fear not, daughter," returned the Superior. "Who is it," she continued, with mild severity and dignity, "that dares unbidden to enter God's holy sanctuary?"

"I, Francis the King!" thundered the monarch. "Let all but the maiden retire. I would speak with her."

"Impossible, Sire," said the Abbess. "Your Majesty knows not what you ask. Daughters of the Sacred Heart, on to the altar!"

"Who talks of impossibilities to me?" cried Francis, furiously. "I am king on every inch of soil in France. Let all but this fair maiden retire, I say. It is my will!"

"This is the house of God, who alone is monarch here," rejoined the Abbess. "Hence, Sire—here you are without authority."

"Who are you who dare to speak thus to me—to me, your King?" demanded the monarch, his brow darkening. "But use one more such word, and, as I live! I will raze your gloomy cloister to the ground, and hang you, its chiefest sinner, high above the ruins. Let go your hold of yon fair flower, and with your ascetic progeny, retire. Begone, I say!"

The Abbess's color came and went; her eye vainly endeavored to hold itself against the fiercer-fired orb of the impetuous King, before whose tremendous will her own was like a quivering reed; and at length, waving her hand to the nuns to withdraw, she released herself from the hold of the pale and trembling novice, and the monarch and the latter were alone.

"Thisbe!" cried Francis, running up and taking her hand, "you cannot mean this. See, here on my knees, I implore you to renounce the horrid thought. Why immure these charms, made for love and sunshine and free air, for the hateful solitude and dreary shades of the cloister?"

"Oh, Sire," returned the maiden, trembling; "talk not thus. Let my love for you, which is pure and true—as was ever vestal's fire in sacred fane, be holy. Rob me not, in this hour so near to ecstatic reverence, of thoughts I would give to Heaven."

"Give Heaven your thoughts, my Thisbe, by giving them to him who has your heart. Where the heart is, there its thoughts are. Would you give to Heaven your thoughts of Francis? Heaven would none of them; for they are not Heaven's, but mine. Put off this ascetic view, worthy only of imbeciles and howling churchmen that make a trade of cant, and idle away in dreary penances lives that should have been devoted to their country and their kind. Men were made for work, not to snivel grim amens; women, to be loving wives and mothers, not to pale away under long useless vigils as crushing as they're vain. Pretty lips were made to kiss, to talk, to sing, not tell dolorous beads. Have done with this wild thought, worthy only of benighted fanatics, useless to themselves and the world. True piety is shown in fairly doing one's work in the world, not shrinking from it, and dawdling life away in dyspeptic prayers. Have done with this. Let me tell yon ghostly mother, you will live for love, not these graveyard walls!"

"Francis, Sire, tempt me not! I am the bride of Heaven, not love's."

"The bride of Heaven is she who earns it by a well-spent life in duty to her kind, her country, and her God. These tapering fingers were made for nobler work than counting dull rosaries; those ruby lips for sweeter pastime than muttering dull aves; those dark eyes for a nobler purpose than weeping for imaginary sins; and those raven locks, woman's sumptuous ornament and crown! for something better than the shears! Come, love; say you will no more of this, the bare

thought of which thrills and unnerves like a shudder."

"Oh, Sire, I had thought you better, braver, than this! Thus to mock and make light of all that is good and true—'tis unlike the high soul that ever reverences the noble and the holy, and never seeks by unworthy jest to undermine their dignity nor worth! I do not think I love you as I did yesterday, and I can now relinquish my last love-sigh with less of regret."

"Say not so Thisbe. You shall hold on to love, not relinquish it, and love me more to-morrow than to-day. Come, let me bear you from this dreary shade. What would the queen of beauty in a gloomy prison, when she has her loving Francis to pay tribute to every charm, and ring her praises to all the world. Come, Thisbe, sweet queen of my hopes and dreams, come!"

"Don't, Francis—dear Francis—as you love me, do not urge me from my vow. Let my love for you continue; let it be, daily and nightly, in my soul, holy as a hymn that leads to thought of heaven."

"Your vow was first to me, Thisbe—in heart, if not in word. First troths should first be kept, or who will say the second can be true. Come, sweet, with your Francis! come, or" (shuddering and hoarsely), "so Heaven help me in my extremest need! The hour that sees these locks that now my fingers wanton with shorn from your fair head shall behold also the last of Francis!"

"Oh, Francis! Horror! Then take me, Francis—take me" (retreating again). "And yet, what have I said! Spare me, Francis, love—spare me! 'Twas my woman's weakness spoke, not I!"

"She loves me, will fly with me from this hated place where grim melancholy is in every breath. O joy, rapture!" (encircling her with his arm). "Come, sweet!"

"No—no" (struggling). "Francis, my love, my Lord, Sire, spare me. I know not what I said. In Heaven's high name, take not advantage of my weakness!"

"It was love that spoke, Thisbe—warm, true, gushing love, more trusty far than grim ice-glooms of the cloister. Sweet love, come!"

"For the sake of that high Name—"

"Hark! Footsteps, and of the sterner sex, too. Hark!"

A side-door was burst open, and the Musketeer, pale and breathless, came running in.

"Behold, your sister, Sire," he cried, "panting. Your sister that was thought dead in childhood, but was only in a trance. The Venetian knew it, when called in, but concealed the knowledge, in part for revenge and partly that he in the future saw great gain from her envied beauty, which from the first had charmed him like a spell; and therefore, on the evening of the day of her entombment, abstracted her from where she lay, brought her out to the air, and when at a safe distance on his way, recalled her back to life."

Francis staggered, laughed, and would have fallen to the floor, but for Louis, who caught both him and Thisbe, the latter of whom had fainted.

"Well, Sir," said Francis to the Musketeer, next day, "you have robbed me of a mistress!"

"But have given you a virtuous girl for a sister, Sire; one tried in the fire, and not found wanting."

"True," smiled the monarch, whose feelings since the scene of the convent had become normal again. "But, bother you, Norman, a sister is all very well in her way, but a lovely, ripe, bewitching mistress is better. You must find me one, Sir, in place of the one you have taken."

"Cheerfully, Sire," said Louis, "if your Majesty will be governed by my selection."

"By all means," laughed the King, "provided she shall have fine qualities."

"What qualities, Sire?"

"First, she must be young, and have as rare beauty as my sister."

"She shall be both young and lovely, Sire."

"Have a warm heart."

"Her heart shall be warm, Sire."

"She must have all the graces of a lady."

"She shall have them, Sire."

"She must be willing to love me for myself."

"She shall love you for nothing else, Sire. Is it a bargain?"

"It is. But," looking at him gravely, "no jesting, Sir."

"There is nothing of the joke in me, Sire."

"Because, Sir," said the King, "if you promise anything of this kind, I shall hold you to it."

"I am quite willing to be held, Sire."

"Are you really in earnest?" asked the King, looking at him, smiling, in astonishment.

"Perfectly so, Sire."

"Then, Sir," said the monarch, "see that you keep your word."

"I shall do so, Sire."

"He has a scheme afoot," mused the monarch, looking after him as he returned to his place by the Queen. "He is no De Bounier, who would do anything, no matter how base, for favor; but an honest man—that is, a sample of that brave human steel which, under all circumstances, stands up for the honor, the truth, and the dignity of human nature."

"Shall I serve the warrant now, Sire, Monsieur De Lemmonier's arrest?" asked the Captain of the Guards. "He rather gave my men the slip yesterday, on the plea that he was on your Majesty's business, and—"

"When did he make that excuse, Sir?" interrupted the King. "Before he went to Chantilly?"

"Yes, Sire."

"He was on our business," said the monarch.

"Shall I arrest him to day, Sire?"

"Why to day?"

"Because, your Majesty, it is irregular to issue a warrant and not have it served."

"The Count de Bounier," called out the Chamberlain.

"The Count, eh?" muttered Francis.

"Umph! I must play adroitly here, and so help the man who has so often served me!" Then addressing himself to the Captain of the Guards: "It is irregular to issue a warrant and not serve it, you say?"

"Yes, Sire."

"Serve it, then."

The Captain went off with a delighted smile.

The next moment, Louis, to his own and the surprise of all the court, was arrested and conveyed to the Conciergerie.

"This is the second time, Musketeer, I have had the honor of locking you up," said the Captain.

"Sir," said Louis, "the same rat has nibbled at my toes as often as five times before noon."

The Captain turned away as if he had been stung, amid the quiet laughter of his men, with whom he was far from popular.

"Imprison me a second time," murmured Louis, as the key was turned upon him, "and I four times saved his sister!" Who can read kings?"

De Bounier, on entering the throne-room, sauntered up to the monarch like one half-confident and yet half afraid of his reception.

"How like a conscious knave he walks!" mused the King. "So Count," he said, in a purposely loud voice, that all might overhear and take warning, "I have been waiting to see you. How much money have you at immediate command?"

"How much does your Majesty wish?" replied De Bounier, not understanding the question, but remembering that his head was in danger.

The monarch reflected a moment, and then answered:

"Our Treasurer has instant need at your hands of a hundred thousand crowns."

De Bounier smiled, but it was of the sickly kind. He saw that something was afoot to smite him. But in life's great game he was a bold if not a crafty player; and though the sum mentioned formed no inconsiderable portion of his fortune, his resolve was at once taken.

"Permit me, Sire," he said, with a calm resolution that was heroic, "to approach your table and write out the order in favor of your Majesty?"

"Do so, Count."

It was only the work of a moment.

The King called a page.

"This to our Treasurer," he said, calmly, "and tell him we desire to know to the minute when the sum is in our coffers."

Every lady saw, or thought they did, that the Count was a fallen man.

"Count," resumed the monarch, in the same loud voice he had used all along, "we have some charges against you."

"Who makes them, Sire?" asked De Bounier, with a sickly smile.

"Ourself, Sir."

"Will your Majesty be pleased to name them?" said De Bounier, preparing himself for the worst. Every man has enemies, Sire."

"Most are their own only enemies, Sir."

"I am waiting to hear the charges, Sire."

First—you kept back till the next day our order for the release of M. de Lemmonier, her Majesty's Musketeer, thereby detaining him seven hours longer than it was our will he should be. At one thousand crowns per hour (a brave man's freedom is worth that, Count), how much is that in all?"

"Seven thousand crowns, your Majesty," answered De Bounier, with a livid smile.

"Secondly—you held over till the next day our order for the revocation of Mademoiselle De Bowmanville's restoration to her post near her Majesty's person, thereby damaging that young lady's feelings thirty-six hours longer than we had decreed. At five hundred crowns per hour (and a young demoiselle's feelings are cheap at that), how much is that, Count?"

"Eighteen thousand crowns, Sire."

"You are an accurate arithmetician, Sir. What have you to say to these charges?"

"It was due to an inadvertence—an unintentional forgetfulness, Sire."

Not one that heard this but felt it was an atrocious falsehood.

"Such inadvertences, Count, are expensive to innocent parties, who ought not to be made to suffer for them. It will cost forty thousand crowns to rebuild the fortress. Forty, eighteen, and seven are how many?"

"Sixty-five thousand, your Majesty," said De Bounier, this time without faltering.

"Three weeks ago yesterday, at midnight, pursued the monarch, "as M. de Lemmonier was returning to Paris from a journey, he was attacked by fifteen men, variously armed with pistols, musketoes, and bludgeons, who fell upon him by surprise, but of whom he, notwithstanding, slew ten before he yielded to two crushing blows from behind that deprived him of every sense. A thousand crowns apiece for each of the ten men killed, and a thousand crowns a day for the fifteen days his wounds obliged him to play the invalid, would not be unreasonable, which, together with the sixty-five, makes just one hundred thousand crowns. Does it not, M. de Bounier?"

"Yes, Sire."

"See what it is to understand the science of numbers, Count! And now, Sir, whom do you think was the leader of the coward-gang that surprised and struck down her Majesty's Musketeer?"

"Nay, Sire, you who know all must know also at least that much."

"But guess."

"I am poor at guessing, Sire."

"The leader of the gang, Sir, was a certain Count de Bounier, who, for that brave act, is hereby dismissed from our court and realm forever, in disgrace, as unworthy to associate with any but ruffians who waylay lonely travelers at night."

There was a long-drawn breath from all the auditors, but not a sound from the expropriated man himself, whose face had that sickly, yellow hue which comes from a sense of utter humiliation.

"The hundred thousand crowns are in the coffers of your Majesty," said the page, who had now returned.

"Tis well!" said Francis. "M. de Bounier," he added, sternly drawing himself up, "you are deprived of your rank, title, and citizenship; you are banished during our reign from our court and country; and if at the end of two hours you are found on the soil of France, your life is forfeited, and any man kill you. Go!"

De Bounier, his face sallow, his gray eyes looking out murkily and with uneasiness from under their arches, his lips twitching, and his step uncertain, sidled noiselessly from the throne-room, with the air of a detected thief.

The King called the Captain of the Guards. "Set thee on the track of that man," he said, pointing to De Bounier.

The Captain bowed and withdrew.

In an hour and three-quarters he returned.

"Well, Sir!" demanded the monarch.

"The man De Bounier, five minutes since, Sire, was in full flight from Paris."

"Tis well," said Francis. "Now go and release Monsieur De Lemmonier, and request him to come here."

"Request him!" muttered the Captain, uneasily. "The tide is changing. 'Tis easy to see who is to be the next favorite!"

On restoring the Musketeer to liberty, he was profuse in attentions and in apologies for his previous remarks. They were all lost on Louis, however, whose Norman wit saw that something favorable to himself had occurred to cause so marked a change in the demeanor of the fellow, whose spaniel-like fawnings he treated with merited contempt.

A few minutes brought him to the palace, where he was surprised to discover, in the ante-room as in the throne-hall, that every eye beamed on him with mingled gratulation and flattering good-will.

"Monsieur De Lemmonier," said the King, holding out a piece of paper as he approached, "please hand this to Mademoiselle De Bowmanville, who will doubtless thank you for it; and this (giving him another of similar size and appearance) to our royal Treasurer, to whom it will introduce you, and who will, we doubt not, give you something in return."

"But, Sire," returned Louis, about a quarter of an hour later, after he had been to the Treasurer's, "I do not understand this. I handed the note, as your Majesty directed, and in return he gave me this green card, in his own handwriting, on which is written, 'Due Louis De Lemmonier, on call, thirty-two thousand crowns.'"

"Mademoiselle De Bowmanville can probably explain it to your satisfaction," smiled the King. "Let us go and ask her."

And taking the young man's arm, he walked toward the Queen, who, surrounded by her maids of honor, was sitting in her usual place.

As the monarch approached, her Majesty's color came and went, and her heart beat violently with mingled hope and—not fear, but an explicable joy.

His eye, on advancing, had in it a kindly light as it met hers. His cheeks, too, were suffused with a generous glow, as if his better nature had the ascendancy, and she took heart, which she had not for many a long day.

Nevertheless, on coming up, Francis, instead of speaking to her, addressed himself to her favorite.

"Mademoiselle De Bowmanville," he said, with a grace which none could put on better than himself when he was so pleased, "my friend here, M. De Lemmonier, holds in his hand a green card. Oblige me by telling him its history and meaning."

"With pleasure, Sire," said Adrienne, stepping apart, with smiling blushingness, with the Musketeer.

"Will your Majesty permit me," said the King, raising to his lips the Queen's hand, which fluttered at his touch.

The maids of honor and other attendants instinctively drew back. They saw, with delighted eyes, as, indeed, did all the court, that sunshine was coming back to her Majesty once more.

"Madame," said the monarch, "frankness. For many months, owing to our estrangement, you did not appear at our levees."

"I felt as if I were unwelcome, Sire, as if your Majesty wished to ostracise me," replied the Queen, agitated, but with dignity.

"For some time past, however, you seem to have insisted upon coming to the throne-room, daily."

"It is my right, Sire. Though an unhappy wife, I am yet the Queen!"

A slight sparkle appeared in the monarch's eye.

"In the face of my marked discourtesy and neglect you have manifested toward me only high respect, obedience, and cordial good-will."

"I had, apparently, lost my position, Sire, and I wished to recover it. I had lost my lord's heart, and I hoped to win it."

The monarch's eye sparkled again.

"Ostracised, and yet determined not to be ignored—unloved, and yet resolved to be a true woman—by my faith! She is made of brave stuff, and deserves to be honorably treated!" inly ejaculated the monarch. "Madame," he said, aloud, holding out his hand, "let the past be past, and our love henceforth as in its spring-time. Is all forgotten, all forgiven?"

A gentle spasmodic pressure told him that a heart, trembling with joy, was waiting to be pressed to his.

"Enough, Madame," he said, raising her hand respectfully to his lips. "I may yet wish to ask a favor of you."

"Be assured, Sire, it is already granted," said the Queen, who could scarcely contain herself.

"Indeed! Be careful. The favor is a great one. But we shall see. One word," he added, in a whisper. "Do your Musketeer and favorite love each other?"

"Deeply, Sire."

"Tis well, Monsieur De Lemmonier."

"Sire," said Louis, advancing.

"You have a fine horse, I understand."

"A very fine one, sire."

"Mount him, sir, and to Normandy, where give our compliments to the Count of Ferat, and say to him that we desire to see him in person at our palace in thirty days."

"Have I your Majesty's permission?" said Louis, bending his knee to the Queen, to show the monarch and all the Court from whom alone he received orders.

"To obey his Majesty, my Musketeer—by all means," returned the Queen.

The King did not wince. He smiled. Perhaps, as thought the Queen, he had an idea before which he could afford to be magnanimous.

The thirty days came and had nearly expired, when, at three o'clock on the afternoon of the last day, the Chamberlain introduced Louis and his father—a gentleman of about fifty, with a tall, commanding air, hair slightly touched with gray, mild and thoughtful but frank and manly features, and bearing a strong resemblance to his son.

Something unusual appeared to be afoot. All the court were arrayed in all the pride and pomp of an important occasion.

The King and Queen were in the royal chairs on the dais, with Thisbe, as the monarch's sister, leaning gracefully, but at ease, on the arm of the latter's chair; the Queen's favorite a little to the right and one step behind the seat of her royal mistress; the Archbishop of Paris and some minor church-dignitaries standing in a line on the left of the throne, and behind them and on the other side a long double row of courtiers and officers of State.

As Louis and his father, preceded by the Chamberlain, advanced up the open space toward the throne, all eyes were turned upon them with marked interest and good-will.

"Monsieur Louis de Lemmonier, Senior, Count of Ferat, Sire," said the Chamberlain, introducing him.

The King hastily stepped forward, and warmly grasped him by the hand.

"Welcome, Count," he said, graciously. "We have long been familiar with your fame as a brave soldier and honorable gentleman, and it gives us pleasure to see you at our court, and to congratulate you upon being the father, in Monsieur De Lemmonier, of a brave and upright man, whom no danger can intimidate, no temptation beguile, and who may well have carved upon his sword 'Fidelity and Right!'"

"Your Majesty is very gracious," said the Count, deeply touched.

"Gracious? No; but just," smiled the monarch, introducing him to the Queen, to Thisbe, and last of all to Adrienne, and then adding, taking him aside, "Count, a word with you."

The Queen called Louis forward.

"Welcome back, my Musketeer," she said, with a smile that told him all had gone well with her during his absence. "Our consort's sister (introducing him to Thisbe), whom you may remember."

"And who will never forget," said Thisbe, radiant in dress and beauty, "the chivalric kindness of Monsieur De Lemmonier in her need."

"You overrate my poor efforts, Madame," said Louis, blushing in spite of himself.

"Oh no," said the Princess. "Services like yours to her Majesty and to me cannot be overrated. But," archly, "are you not yearning to see your bride?"

"My bride?" said Louis, in confusion.

"Why, did you not know, Monsieur De Lemmonier, that his Majesty designed this day to make you happy with Mademoiselle De Bowmanville, and that he sent for the Count of Ferat because he thought it would be agree-

able, both to the Count and you, to have him at the bridal."

Louis, his eyes sparkling, was well nigh sinking.

"I see that the Princess has prepared him," whispered the King to the Count. "Let us go forward. M. De Lemmonier," he added, aloud, "we have business in our private saloon, to which we invite you. Will you lead in Mademoiselle De Bowmanville?"

A month later, when Louis and Adrienne had returned from La Forte, whither they had gone to spend the honeymoon, the King approached the Queen, who was conversing with her favorite and the Princess, and said, with a meaning smile.

"I have now come to ask my favor of your Majesty."

"What is it, Sire?"

"That you disband the Queen's Musketeers, as the King's Guards should be the Queen's, also."

"What now?" inly exclaimed Louis and tall Jacques, who were standing near.

"They are looking at each other—good," muttered the King, glancing at them. "I thought they would feel the blow! What says your Majesty?" he asked, aloud.

"I live only to obey you, Sire. Musketeers!"

Louis and Jacques advanced.

"Yes, Madame."

"At his Majesty's request, the Queen's Musketeers, as a company, are disbanded and dismissed."

Louis and Jacques bowed, the former coloring with surprise, the latter speechless with consternation.

The King smiled a moment at their confusion, and then said:

"Now, gentlemen, that you are no longer in her Majesty's service, you may, without hesitation, enter into mine. Monsieur De Lemmonier!"

"Sire?"

"Since yesterday I have been the only captain in the Guards, and I tire of the office. Take it."

"Sire, I am unfit. I have had so little experience—I—"

"Tut-tut, Sir. Courage and intelligence fit a man for any post."

"Good doctrine!" muttered tall Jacques.

"Take the captaincy," entreated the King.

"I will, Sire, and with many thanks, on one condition."

"Name it."

"That my friend, Monsieur Jacques Fromage (who bowed), a brave and honorable man, Sire, may enter the corps with me."

"There is but one objection; he is not of blood, and only men of noble families may enter the King's Guards."

"Your Majesty, on my bridal-day, besides munificently rewarding my father, the Count of Ferat, for his services to his country, generously exalted his rank by conferring upon him a cordon of the Order of the Golden Fleece."

"What then, Sir?"

"Monsieur Jacques Fromage is not of blood, Sire; but your Majesty can make him so."

Tall Jacques wondered if he was really awake, or on his head or his feet.

"On what ground, Sir?" asked the King. "Nobility is granted only for State services rendered."

"May it please you, Sire," said Louis, "Monsieur Jacques Fromage is the gentleman who came to my assistance when I had the honor in the market-place, to rescue your Majesty's sister, the Princess, from the mob."

"Tis well," said the King, bowing to tall Jacques. "Your request is granted. The patent shall be issued this very hour. Are you content?"

"Yes, Sire."

"And you, Monsieur Fromage?"

Tall Jacques, whose eyelids were wet, could only bow, which he did with a grace not unworthy of an ex-Musketeer.

"Have you anything further to say, Monsieur De Lemmonier?" asked the King.

"Yes, Sire—a question."

"What is it?"

"Will your Majesty be pleased to tell me why, on the day of the banishment of the Count de Bounier, your Majesty authorized my arrest?"

"There was bad blood between you," replied the King, with a friendly smile. "When he came in, I caught the glance that passed

between you, and, aware of what was in store for him, I felt that, notwithstanding his disgrace, you would follow and call him to account. True, you were a master of fence, and able to protect yourself. But he also is a rare swordsman, and, knowing that when I had performed my work upon him, his mind would be wrought up to a desperation and subtlety unknown to him before (patting Louis on the shoulder), I did not wish to risk the future Captain of my Guards!"

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